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The Theatre Book of the Year

1946  1947



# The THEATRE Book

## OF THE YEAR

1946 ✧ 1947

*A Record and an Interpretation*

B Y

GEORGE JEAN NATHAN

ALFRED



A. KNOPF

NEW YORK : 1947

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FIRST EDITION

## Foreword

ONCE AGAIN it is to be hoped that the following chapters may convey to the reader a sufficient over-all picture of the theatrical season under consideration. If they do not fulfil that purpose, any explanatory foreword would be just that much more superfluous. I accordingly leave the record to speak for itself and pass on to a few other more or less related matters which figured within the period's frame.

One of the conspicuous elements of the season was its emphasis on the fact that the Negro actor is finding a steadily increasing acceptance on the white stage, both dramatic and musical. The number of mixed casts reached an all-time high. That the popularity of colored performers is not confined to New York, but extends to what is referred to as the road and even much farther afield may be deduced, among various other such singular reports, from an item culled from the Negro newspaper, the Los Angeles, California, *Tribune*:

"In an all-white town in Oklahoma, population of about 1200, and not a single Negro in it . . . the only newspaper in town was published a day ahead of schedule just so our show could get as much publicity as possible." Thus Powell Lindsay, director of the Negro Drama Group, told of his group's reception during a five week tour, using the Broadway hit, *Claudia*, as a vehicle.

This side of the stage, it was to be hoped that the managers and producers would at last give an eye to the character of their opening night audiences, whose verdicts often spell success or failure for their ventures. I appreciate that the subject has been brought up in other seasons, but in view of the nature of the great majority of plays that had



been put on, one had not been able to work up much interest in it, since any kind of audience, even the low-grade première one, seemed sufficiently suited to pass judgment on them. But with things taking a different turn, a house-cleaning appeared to be in order and, ever prodigal in the dispensation of advice, I was not reluctant to offer some to the aforesaid gentlemen, on the cuff.

The very first recommended step toward improving the quality of the initial congregation, I allowed, was to rid it of its quota of moving picture scouts and agents. Solely concerned with either the film possibilities of a play or the screen possibilities of an actor or actress, these maggots, who know little or nothing and care less about the drama, simply do not belong and should forthwith be dispatched back to where they crawled from. This should not be too difficult for the managers and producers to bear, since a number of the picture companies have recently stated that they no longer are as much interested in buying plays as heretofore, that they no longer are as much interested in backing plays as heretofore, and that they prefer to work independently of the theatre. All that consequently is left to the scouts and agents is the bribing and stealing of actors and actresses, and I hardly think that the managers and producers need much exiling persuasion on that point.

Even should the movie companies change their minds, these fungi are and will remain a source of audience corruption. This is plainly evident from their past record. The plays which they have admired and recommended for screen purchase have generally been not the better plays but the poorer. In other words, not the plays of any real quality but those whose lack of quality have made them suitable to the mass digestion and esteem necessary to film prosperity. Not more than one new play of any critical merit produced in the theatre in the last four seasons, by way of proof, has yet been bought by the film people. If I am mistaken, let me hear who bought the rights to *A Highland Fling*, *A Sound Of Hunting*, *The Mermaids Singing*, *Outrageous Fortune*, *Dark Of The Moon*, *The Deep Mrs. Sykes*, *The Fatal Weakness*, or *The Iceman Cometh*. Also

let me hear which agent or scout recommended any one of them. Thus, aside from *Harvey*, which has been withheld from the market and *The Voice Of The Turtle*, which the films purchased, and dismissing from consideration the critically over-touted *The Glass Menagerie*, there has been no slightest warrant for the presence at any deserving first night of the barnacles in question.

On the index, along with the above, should promptly go the two to three hundred Broadway hangers-on, male and female, whose idea of reputable drama is anything, however bad, that promises to be a smash popular success and to whom any dramatic gamble on poetic expression, imagination, and delicacy is so much horsemeat. Such characters have their place at even the better commercial drama — at plays like *A Bell For Adano*, *Born Yesterday*, and the sort — and may be very welcome to the producers thereof. But they surely have no place with and present a serious challenge and danger to producers of anything that aims at a somewhat higher artistic level. The producer who lets them in at anything like an O'Neill, O'Casey or even Saroyan play, or at one by Shaw or any other playwright of position, is playing with loaded dice.

It is thus that any beginning headway made in the local theatre by any authentic dramatist, American or European, has been for the most part not in the Broadway theatre with its considerable proportion of Broadway-minded herring but in theatres removed from Broadway, or at matinee performances while the herring in question have still been asleep, or at the hands of small groups shunned by the herring on suspicion of highbrowism and because no comradely Broadway gossip columnists were likely to be present. Shaw got his start that way, and so did O'Neill, and so did O'Casey, and so did Saroyan. And so, too, did a wide variety like Ibsen, Strindberg, Echegaray, Porto-Riche, Hervieu, Yeats, Synge, *et al.*

One often hears the argument that one of the biggest curses of the opening night audience is the so-called society element. In other words, the element customarily described by Broadway reporters as the ermine and orchid

set, an ensemble which has not been worn by ladies of society since Diamond Jim Brady began escorting thus adorned Rialto game. It strikes me that the argument is faulty on several counts. In the first place, these society folk rarely if ever attend the opening night of any play heralded as important drama but usually reserve their presence either for the musical shows or for the openings of such fluffy pets of theirs as Noel Coward and the English like and of the producers who offer vehicles for such of their favorite players as Lunt and Fontanne, Gertrude Lawrence (when the evening is not disturbingly devoted to Bernard Shaw), Clifton Webb, *et al.* To say that their presence at such stuff is hurtful is like saying that the presence in the same audiences of as many profound drama scholars would be beneficial. Not only are they fully appropriate to the occasions but materially, from a commercial viewpoint, eminently desirable.

There is the further argument against these dandiprats that they are always in the habit of arriving late and conducting their chatter after the curtain has gone up. While the argument is partly true, it is still no truer than any similar argument that might be lodged against many other and different audiences. The audience at the opening of *Maid In The Ozarks*, for just one example, was in major part the sort that did not wear collars and ties and that, on its female side, looked as if it had been fished out of Sheepshead Bay at low tide. Yet it was so tardy in arriving that the curtain had to be held for at least twenty minutes and so full of gabble after it went up that one could not make out for at least twenty more what the actors were saying, thank God.

The season brought with it in an extra-critical direction both the Ballet Russe and Ballet Theatre companies and once again the air about us was filled with learned allusions to *entrechats*, *fouettés*, *tours en l'air* and the like, mostly on the part of individuals whose terpsichorean profundity, one suspects, had been gained from attendance upon Dorothy Stone and Buck and Bubbles. Of all the stage arts, the ballet has excelled in creating such snobs and posturers,

since it imposes much less than any of the others the need for an educated knowledge in the subject and since one can get away with the kind of opinion that in these other quarters would meet with embarrassing challenge, if not seltzer siphons.

This is not to say, obviously, that the ballet itself does not demand a high degree of study, training, experience, talent, and imagination. It is simply to say that it demands little of the sort from the majority of its customers and that it consequently exercises a decided appeal to such as wish to talk art fairly convincingly without knowing anything at all about it. One can not talk of drama and avoid a brick unless one knows something about it; nor can one talk of opera, music, painting, stage direction, or even acting. But when it comes to ballet, the veriest imbecile can get by pretty freely. Give him a few such clichés as "grace," "fluidity," "nuance," and "composition," and he is set, provided only he has the knack of keeping his features etched into the proper gravity. If I had a moron son, one unable to add up even two figures or to penetrate the political motives of Henry Wallace, I should get him a job as a dance critic. He would probably be a howling success and able to support his old man in his declining years.

The prosperity of the various ballet companies in recent seasons is undoubtedly due not to the unquestioned merit of some of them but largely to the aforesaid snobs and posturers. It has become fashionable to be a ballet devotee and people with an itch to be known as fashionable fasten themselves upon it like pomaded leeches, sucking its superficial aspects from it and spraying them out on anyone who is willing to listen. Fortified by a reading of such books of reminiscences as Romola Nijinsky's, they profess to be on intimate speaking terms with the art of a great dancer whom they never even saw. And, fortified further by a perusal of various other such tomes, they constitute themselves authorities on everything from the genius of Pavlova to the impresario errors of Diaghileff and from the big toe balance of Karsavina to Anisfeld's revolutionary

décor for the Submarine Ballet from Rimsky-Korsakov's *Sadko*.

Let the currently incomparable Alicia Markova bend her torso so much as one-third of an inch to the left and these wiseacres will point out, not without some acerbity, that Sofia Fedorova, upon whom they never laid eyes, would certainly never have permitted herself any such thing but would instead have bent hers one-sixth of an inch to the right. Let Anton Dolin perform however ably and they will horrifiedly blanch at the mere thought of comparing him even remotely with Kshessinsky, whom they have engaged only in print. Eglevsky, they will shrug, is all right in his way, but Monakov! Verchinina, pah! you should have seen Smirnova! And so it patters on and on, like stage rain in the old Belasco clapping.

The success of the ballet, aside from these charlatans, has been further assisted in the recent years by the kind of people who, while frankly pretending to no knowledge of the art, are drawn to it much as other people are drawn to the ice-skating and roller-skating shows. In other words, by the kind who are enchanted by simple movement of whatever species. A stage occupied solely with physical flux fascinates them. Nothing to tax the minds they haven't got; nothing to strain the attention; nothing in the way of dialogue to trouble; nothing that presents the slightest personal exertion. For two hours such innocents know that they may experience the soothing delights of motion, and without worry or concern as to what the motion signifies. For two hours they may get the same general effect that their brothers and sisters get from ice-skaters and roller-skaters, and under the name of art, they tickle themselves to reflect, to boot. It's fun and, for extra measure, they can preen themselves on their more exalted tastes and lord it over their neighbors who are content with Sonja Henie.

The reader is to be reminded once again that the above animadversions are in no sense directed against the ballet itself but solely against those quacks and frauds in its audience who employ it as a means to glorify their artistic ignorance, to mingle with the bontons, and to pass them-

selves off on a higher social stratum than their persons warrant. The ballet, it need hardly be remarked, is an art form compounded of music, drama, painting, and the dance and at its best is alive with radiant rhythm and beauty. In late years it here and there has been bastardized by the injection into it of a kind of dime-novel realism and a kind of pulp magazine satire, apparently no end pleasing to the sort of people who buy their jewelry in the novelty shops. And even in its more honest forms it has suffered now and again from the inclusion of dancers, male and female, who would not have been allowed within a mile of any of the old ballet theatres of Europe. But by and large and save when it goes in for newfangled pretence, slip as it sometimes may it still provides the knowledgeable audience of the world with an artistic Esperanto. At its finest, it can carry to the four corners its impress of visual magic, its message of the lovely calms of a peaceful yesterday, and its silent criticism of all those hucksters of evil who would take over its stage and, jumping wild-eyed upon it, would exhort us once again to put aside all the pleasures of art and life, to grab up the old gun from the rack, and to go out and shoot the pants off everybody in sight.

The paper war waged by playwrights against critics, which has been in festive operation for centuries and which burst forth with a renewed vivacity last season, again got under way in this, though with relatively less spritz. Sparked by Miss Lillian Hellman, whose play, *Another Part Of The Forest*, failed to receive the full measure of eulogy which she deemed to be its due, the Dramatists' Guild, of whose council the lady is a conspicuous figure, dispatched the following caveat to the New York Drama Critics' Circle:

We have hesitated long to bring to your official attention certain frequently repeated distressing incidents on opening nights in the theatre, involving some of your members. . . . Our specific complaints as to a small number of your members of whose opening night behavior we complain is (a) coming to the theatre in a physical condition which precludes capac-

ity to appraise a play intelligently; (b) coming after curtain time; and (c) carrying on audible conversation with companions during the performance. One or more of these things have been occurring among those few over such a substantial period of time and with such frequency that we determined that they can no longer be overlooked. We have no intention of releasing this to the press, but we indulge the hope that you will take it upon yourselves, in the interests of the theatre, to remedy these abuses.

The fiat was signed by Richard Rodgers as president and by the following members of the council: Oscar Hammerstein 2nd, Victor Wolfson, Edward Chodorov, George S. Kaufman, Howard Lindsay, Russel Crouse, Owen Davis, and, of course, Miss Hellman.

Overlooking the quality of the impeachment's grammar and syntax, which would seem to indicate the desirability of some additional schooling for its playwright signatories, we analyze the complaint. It is, first, that some critics occasionally show the effects of having imbibed a few hookers before arriving at the theatre; secondly, that some come in five or ten minutes after a play has started; and, thirdly, that some sometimes talk while the show is going on. The complaint is undoubtedly founded on fact, to a degree. But the fact is only half the story. Unless my eyes have deceived me, I have not, with one single exception in the last ten years, seen a critic in his cups at any play worth intelligent critical attention. When and if I have seen a colleague somewhat under the weather — and I have not engaged the spectacle more than a few times in the period specified — it has been invariably at plays that called for delirium tremens, much less a mild edge, to stand them at all. The record of sobriety on such occasions, and it has run into imposing figures, is, if anything, a testimonial either to the endurance or to the stupidity of the critics.

Here, of course, arises the question as to how the critic who has taken a number of snifters can possibly know in advance that the play is going to be a stinker. I may confide on such temulent colleagues' behalf that it sometimes is as

easy as rolling off a log, and often much easier. A playwright who for years has purveyed turkeys is not very likely overnight to serve up a pheasant. A producer who has never put on anything but trash is not likely to turn out to be a Meyerhold, Stanislavsky, or Reinhardt. A company of actors known from previous performances to be hams may not be expected instantaneously to become artists of the serenest karat. And a director whose past efforts have been eminently sour may be anticipated in all probability to retain his acidity. There are, furthermore, often the out-of-town tryouts which waft ahead their betraying odors. And there is above all, if I may be so bold as to say so, that critical instinct which somehow frequently has a way of very accurate prognostication.

I dislike to be unnecessarily impolite but it was very easy in the present season for any experienced critic to foretell in advance that none of the following plays or shows would be worth a hoot: *Maid In The Ozarks*, *The Bees And The Flowers*, *The Dancer*, *Loco*, *It Takes Two*, *Naughty-Naught*, *Toplitzky Of Notre Dame*, *The Haven*, *Hidden Horizon*, *A Family Affair*, *Wonderful Journey*, *Lovely Me*, and *The Big Two*, among others. And last season it was just as simple to predict to one's self what these and others would be like: *Round Trip*, *Oh, Brother!*, *Make Yourself At Home*, *The Ryan Girl*, *The Girl From Nantucket*, *Marriage Is For Single People*, *The Duchess Misbehaves*, and *This, Too, Shall Pass*.

Under the circumstances, why shouldn't a critic show up *altissimo*?

The second complaint is that some critics arrive at the theatre after the performance has begun. The complaint is justified. A critic, drunk or sober, should be in his seat when the curtain goes up. It may discommode him but, if he isn't, it discommodes the audience probably even more, and a critic should have decent manners. Let him leave early if the play is a bad one with obviously no hope of improving, but let him, if only for appearances, get there on time.

With the third complaint I have, however, little sympa-



thy. The mere fact that a critic is inclined to talk to his companion during a play indicates that the play is not holding him and that he is disposed to seek a little entertainment on his own. No one, even a critic, is found gabbing during the course of an interesting play. The more talk in an audience, the less talk, you may be sure, there should have been on the stage.

The reactions to the Dramatists' Guild's indictment, along with an independent extra grouse registered by its Miss Hellman, were four in number:

1. John Mason Brown in his capacity as president of the Critics' Circle replied briefly to the Guild that the Critics' Circle was not a chapter of the Boy Scouts, that it did not supervise its personnel's conduct and parlor manners, and that if the Guild thought that any critic should be put on the carpet, the complaint against him should be lodged with his editor, provided that the latter could be found sober.

2. Miss Hellman's subsequent complaint to one such located editor whose critic she alleged had condemned her play only because he was half seas over drew the hardly reassuring reply that next time the editor would send the dimsighted James Thurber to review her play, accompanied by a seeing-eye dog. According to John Chapman, Thurber fell in with the idea and promised also to bring along an ear-trumpet.

3. The Critics' Circle threw a Christmas party to itself at which it was suggested that the member accused by Miss Hellman of having been three sheets in the wind at her play be fined five hundred dollars, the money to be spent on alcoholic refreshments for the other members.

4. It was unofficially agreed that it would not have been such a bad idea to return to the Dramatists' Guild its communication with the following amendments:

We have hesitated long to bring to your official attention certain frequently repeated distressing incidents on opening nights in the theatre, involving some of your members. Our specific complaints as to not so small a number of your mem-

bers of whose opening night behavior we complain is (a) coming into the theatre in a mental, literary and dramaturgical condition which precludes capacity to write a play intelligently or in almost any other way; (b) coming strictly at curtain time and thus often boring the life out of us for some time longer than is necessary; and (c) carrying on audible conversation among your characters during the performance. One or more of these things have been occurring among your members over such a substantial period of time and with such frequency that we determined that they can no longer be overlooked. We have no intention of releasing this to the press, though the temptation is nigh overwhelming, but we indulge the hope that you will take it upon yourselves, in the interests of the theatre, to remedy these abuses.

In better English, as befits critics, of course.

No one, I hope, will contend that a reputable playwright has not a full right to protest when and if his reputable play is reviewed by a critic who for one reason or another is incompetent to review it. On any such occasion, I am all for the playwright against the critic. But, though I have read plenty reviews in my time that, were I such a playwright, would have made me sick at my stomach, I have read few that were the result of anything but critical incompetence. Intoxication, late arrival, or incidental social conversation has seldom had anything to do with their incompetence. They were just plain, congenitally dumb to start with.

It is, however, rarely the reputable playwright who figures among the critic-baiters. The baiter, one will usually find, is either a hack or a writer whose vanity greatly outweighs his talent. It is these dyed peacocks in particular who wax indignant over bad notices and who seek their origins not in their own bad plays but in extrinsic circumstances. A favorable review written by a numskull hugely gratifies them; an unfavorable by an intelligent critic grossly affronts them. They suffer from delusions of grandeur and, when the quality of their imagined grandeur is

disturbingly pointed out to be tinsel, they become cry-babies. The critic who disillusiones them thus immediately becomes to them, if they can not at the moment think of anything worse, an alcoholic. I am, surely, no more in favor of alcoholics than they are. But I still somehow seem to remember that among the boozers who wrote some pretty fair criticism were, to cite only a few, Ben Jonson, Dryden, Lessing, Voltaire, Beaumarchais, Gustav Freytag, Hazlitt, and our own Edgar Allan Poe.

Let us look at the offerings of the Dramatists' Guild's signatories during the last dozen years and determine which of them really called for any vital sobriety on the part of the critics.

The Messrs. Rodgers' and Hammerstein's contributions were musical shows, and for the most part unusually good ones which were highly praised by the critics. It would, however, take a peculiar person to maintain that such shows, meritorious though they are, demand a particularly clear mind for their appraisal. A few drinks help almost any musical show, as is pretty well known. After all, it isn't Wagner who is writing the shows.

Victor Wolfson has offered the following:

1. *Bitter Stream*, taken from a novel by Silone and obvious enough even to a critic partly in his cups.
2. *Excursion*, a pleasant comedy that got a unanimous sober attention.
3. *Pastoral*, a seedy comedy that expired after fourteen performances and that even vodka would not have made seem any better.
4. *The Family*, a play derived from Nina Federova's novel of the same name, which lasted for only seven performances and would have been improved by a case of Scotch.

Edward Chodorov's gifts were:

1. *Kind Lady*, a thriller adapted from a story by Hugh Walpole and interesting enough to engage the attention of a critic, if willing to suspend his mentality.

2. *Cue For Passion*, a murder mystery play in collaboration with H. S. Kraft which ran for twelve performances and which would not have benefited from even a first-class bun.

3. *Those Endearing Young Charms*, a play that was born in Hollywood and that made any sober critic feel extremely drowsy.

4. *Decision*, a propaganda exhibit that properly called for at least four or five hookers of three-star Hennessy.

5. *Common Ground*, another and even poorer one that called for at least five or six.

George S. Kaufman's bequests in the twelve-year period:

1. *Merrily We Roll Along*, in collaboration with Moss Hart, a forced and mediocre play that encouraged critical attention only because of the previous highly commendable collaboration, *Once In A Lifetime*, and some other earlier interesting performances.

2. *First Lady*, a collaboration with Katharine Dayton and commonplace box-office goods that called only for casual reviewing.

3. *Stage Door*, a collaboration with Edna Ferber and amiable box-office stuff that assuredly required no crystal-clear mind for its full and proper assimilation.

4. *You Can't Take It With You*, a collaboration with Hart and a jolly evening for whistle-wetters and whistle-drys alike.

5. *I'd Rather Be Right*, a collaboration with Hart and a music show book which, while not nearly so good as Mr. Kaufman's collaboration on *Of Thee I Sing*, a grand job, was sufficiently amusing. *Vide* comment above on criticism of musical shows.

6. *The Fabulous Invalid*, a collaboration with Hart which called for a lot of Swedish punch preferably mixed with some puissant Kirschwasser and Bisquit Dubouchet.

7. *The American Way*, a collaboration with Hart and patriotic whoopedoodle which any sober critic had a hell of a time sitting through.

8. *The Man Who Came To Dinner*, a collaboration with Hart and an entertaining comedy at which the critics to a man were on the waterwagon, apparently.

9. *George Washington Slept Here*, a collaboration with Hart and a rubbishy comedy that called for some extra-powerful schnaps.

10. *The Land Is Bright*, a collaboration with Edna Ferber and generally agreed to demand copious entr'acte swigs.

11. *The Late George Apley*, a collaboration with John P. Marquand and deserving of critical abstinence.

12. *Hollywood Pinafore*, a musical show book based on the Gilbert and Sullivan *H.M.S. Pinafore* and one that would have seemed just as bad after a keg of Löwenbräu.

13. *Park Avenue*, a musical show book in collaboration with Nunnally Johnson that needed a chaser of 500 proof whiskey spiked with a little 600 proof.

Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse came forth separately and in combination with these:

1. *A Slight Case Of Murder*, a Lindsay collaboration with the late lamented Damon Runyon that failed to jell and could have been correctly appraised by a critic with a bad hangover.

2. *Red, Hot and Blue*, a collaborative music show book that foundered. *Vide* note on criticism of such music show books.

3. *Hooray For What?*, a collaborative music show book with only two amusing scenes. *Vide* ditto.

4. *Life With Father*, a collaboration based on the book by Clarence Day and a very genial and immensely prosperous comedy that almost any kind of critic could enjoy cold sober.

5. *Strip For Action*, a collaborative dud which a gallon of Pommard Rugiens '37 would not have made acceptable.

6. *State Of The Union*, a collaboration which the critics saw fit to review in a remarkable state of sobriety and which they therefore admired excessively, but which, were

I a drinking man, would have benefited from an engagement with Old Grandad.

Owen Davis' record:

1. *Too Many Boats*, a turkey that called for a gallon of Myer's Jamaica rum.

2. *Spring Freshet*, another that called for another gallon.

3. *Ethan Frome*, a dramatization, in collaboration with Donald Davis, of the Edith Wharton novel, and meriting critical abstemiousness.

4. *Virginia*, a music show book, and a bad one, in collaboration with Laurence Stallings. *Vide* note on even good music show books.

5. *Mr. and Mrs. North*, a murder mystery play based on a novel by Frances and Richard Lockridge which was fair popular entertainment, but since when has teetotalism been vital to the digestion of murder mystery plays?

6. *The Snark Was A Boojum*, based on a novel by Richard Shattuck and a prime crumb which was removed after five performances and would have needed a barrel of strong waters to sit it out.

7. *No Way Out*, an echo of the problem plays of the Broadway of forty years ago, one which even a plunge into the Old Oscar Pepper distillery would not have helped, and which was hauled away after eight showings.

Lillian Hellman's contributions:

1. *The Children's Hour*, a sound play and one which properly demanded the sober attention of the critics.

2. *Days To Come*, a deserved prompt failure which was produced before the time of that temperance fanatic, Wolcott Gibbs, but which justified his predecessor, the late lamented Robert Benchley, in hoisting a few.

3. *The Little Foxes*, an ably contrived melodrama posing as something much loftier which drew enthusiastic encomiums from every critic in the house, save one, me, who was apparently too sober.

4. *Watch On The Rhine*, another that did the same, also with the single exception, me, ditto.

5. *The Searching Wind*, muddled claptrap that also did the same, with two exceptions, one of them me, and both ditto.

6. *Another Part Of The Forest*, spasmodic and pretentious melodrama that also did the same, with three exceptions, again one of them me, and all three ditto.

Finally, to end on a less pleasant note, the increasing and almost prohibitive costs of play production, brought about by the avarice of the various labor unions serving the theatre, cast their baleful shadows ahead. Unless some means are devised to check the mounting demands, which in the case of the stagehands' union have gone to the absurd limit of threatening action on plays with a single set of scenery unless extra hands are employed for a second imaginary set, the future may see an unavoidable, drastic curtailment of production.

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The Theatre Book of the Year

1946  1947



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# Honor List

THE BEST NEW DRAMATIC PLAY:

*THE ICEMAN COMETH*,

by Eugene O'Neill

THE BEST NEW COMEDY:

*THE FATAL WEAKNESS*, by George Kelly

THE BEST NEW MUSICAL:

*FINIAN'S RAINBOW*, by E. Y. Harburg,  
Fred Saily and Burton Lane

THE BEST MALE ACTING PERFORMANCE:

RALPH RICHARDSON, in *Henry IV*, Part II

THE BEST FEMALE ACTING PERFORMANCE:

INA CLAIRE, in *The Fatal Weakness*

THE BEST ENSEMBLE PERFORMANCE:

The JOHN GIELGUD *The Importance Of  
Being Earnest* company

THE BEST STAGE DIRECTOR, DRAMATIC:

GEORGE KELLY, in *The Fatal Weakness*

THE BEST STAGE DIRECTOR, MUSICAL:

ROBERT LEWIS, in *Brigadoon*

THE BEST SCENE DESIGNER, DRAMATIC:

ROBERT EDMOND JONES, in *The Iceman  
Cometh*

THE BEST SCENE DESIGNER, MUSICAL:

OLIVER SMITH, in *Beggar's Holiday*

THE BEST COSTUME DESIGNER, DRAMATIC:

CECIL BEATON, in *Lady Windermere's Fan*

THE BEST COSTUME DESIGNER, MUSICAL:

ELEANOR GOLDSMITH, in *Finian's Rain-  
bow*

THE BEST STAGE LIGHTING:

JO MIELZINER, in *Happy Birthday*

THE BEST CHOREOGRAPHER:

AGNES DE MILLE, in *Brigadoon*

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# The Year's Productions

THE OLD VIC THEATRE COMPANY

MAY 6, 1946

*Presenting a repertory of plays consisting of Shakespeare's Henry IV, Part I and Part II, the latter on May 7, Chekhov's Uncle Vanya, on May 13, and Sophocles' Œdipus and Richard Brinsley Sheridan's The Critic, on May 20. Offered under the local patronage of Theatre Incorporated for a 6 weeks' engagement in the Century Theatre.*

## THE COMPANY

Laurence Olivier, Miles Malleon, Margaret Leighton, Sidney Tafler, Nicolette Bernard, David Kentish, Kenneth Edwards, Bryony Chapman, George Cooper, Max Brent, Ralph Richardson, Joyce Redman, Ena Burrill, Peter Copley, Michael Raghan, Robin Lloyd, William Monk, Diana Maddox, Joseph James, Jane Wenham, Nicholas Hannen, George Relph, Michael Warre, Harry Andrews, Cecil Winter, George Rose, Frank Duncan, John Garley, William Squire, Brian Parker.

Directors: John Burrell, Michel Saint-Denis, and Miles Malleon.

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FOR WEEKS before the company opened its local engagement, American theatregoers were to be observed congratulating themselves that at last they would be privileged to hear actors with voices and diction which they could listen to for a change with rich satisfaction and pleasure, as if they themselves were all such purists in those directions that the speech of even a Harvard don was enough to drive them frantic. What we engaged here was, of course, the time-honored notion that English actors *en masse* are by nature uniformly so gifted in punctilious delivery and are so precise in diction and so scrupulous in pronunciation that any American actor seems in contrast an oaf with his mouth full of frogs' legs Provençale. It may be true that

many of our actors are pretty slovenly in such departments and often give the impression that the human mouth has been superseded as a locutionary organ by the nose. It is also true that a liberal portion of them appear to have studied diction under an itinerant kidney tonic pitchman and pronunciation of the parts of the English language under some bush league umpire or fellow actor. But it is scarcely true that English actors are ever of such a purity of speech as would shame the toga off Cicero or that American actors on the other hand are invariably such slouches as would make the late Dutch Schultz seem in comparison a Demosthenes.

Americans are, however, not alone in a snobbish adherence to the idea. The English themselves are with them, and with trumpets. So ingrained is their prejudice in their own favor, indeed, that let an English actor like Maurice Evans abandon his native land and take up residence and citizenship in this benighted outpost and it is not long before his former countrymen, who earlier admired him no end, conclude that they were miserably mistaken about him. I here speak from the record. A number of my very good English friends, among them several leading London theatrical lights, who some years ago considered Evans to be one of the bright hopes of their theatre, now that he is no longer one of them have looked at me with a condescending pity when I have ventured to speak well of him. "His speech, for just one thing," they say, "has since he came over to your country gone to hell."

For one English actor like Richardson or Olivier in this Old Vic company, there are three or four whose sharply scissored speech and corrupt pronunciations are absurd and even slightly painful to any American ear practised beyond an appreciation of burlesque shows and mid-Western stock companies. To the English ear, such speech and pronunciations are from habit and long usage naturally acceptable. They not only seem the quite correct thing but pass unnoticed, as certain outrageous attributes of our own seem and pass with us. But two wrongs do not make a right, and to any ear, whether British or American, that

puts accent and precision above tradition and chauvinism voices like these English which are barbered with steel clippers and pronunciations such as, in the present instance, "bargin," "pawkit," "rond," etc., are anything but molasses-sweet.

I hope that no one will be so foolish as to think that these animadversions proceed from either a natural or forced admiration of the American manner of things. Far from it, as anyone must know who has followed my opinions on the latter for a good many years. The English actor, if not actress, at his best is in such matters usually superior to the American equivalent. But the theory that the average English actor invariably makes the average American look like an illiterate should take a bad beating from anyone who appraised the bulk of this Old Vic company.

The productions of the two parts of *Henry IV* with which the visitors made their bow were, furthermore, second-rate. If this was real ensemble acting, as I read in various local critical quarters it was, I do not know real ensemble acting when I see it and doubtless mistook what I have esteemed as real ensemble acting in, among others, the old Moscow Art Theatre company for something that was nothing of the kind. The direction of John Burrell was additionally open to considerable skepticism. It lent to the two plays, the first in particular, a pace frequently so halting and a progression so languid that I, for one, longed at times even for a little of that excessive stage life all too deplorably common to many American exhibits. Mr. Burrell, except for the street and tavern scenes in Part II, seemed to have sat the plays down at a table and to have had them confer with the actors. The result was to make them tediously conversational. That he renounced arbitrary movement at the expense of dramatic sense was to his credit. Nothing is more preposterous than that kind of movement which is often so bewitching to our local audiences. But while the American theatrical conviction that no one ever sits in a chair unless he is a king, a judge, or a paralytic, that drama is non-existent save the human corpus is on its legs and going somewhere, and that even comedy is like-



wise save maybe when a man and woman find themselves lying in a bed — while the conviction is responsible for one of our own gravest directorial faults, I still confess that I would not have minded a slight application of it to this Old Vic stage.

The settings by Gower Parks, the majority of the costumes by Roger Furse, and the lighting by John Sullivan contributed very little to the general picture.

The relative highlight in both plays and in the second particularly was the Falstaff creation of Ralph Richardson's. While it is rather difficult for any actor not to come off in the role in whichever of the several works it figures, as the ample records attest, Richardson brought to it, aside from the usual and recognizable bag of old tricks, certain qualities which other actors often have failed to. Among these were a histrionic realization of its inner childish nature, of its intrinsic contradictory emotional and mental facets, and of its paradoxical wit and stupidity at times operating in unison. Aside from this performance, a few scattered moments in Olivier's *Hotspur*, and Joyce Redman's *Doll Tearsheet*, I could not, however, with all my American hospitality operating at full blast, see anything in the productions that merited the encomiums which had been meted out to them both in England and here.

With *Uncle Vanya*, its third presentation, it became increasingly plain that the local admiration for the company was based not on its acting performances and stage productions but on its high ideals and courageous enterprise. These, surely, were deserving of all the admiration that anyone could bestow upon them, and I was glad to join the crowd and contribute to the cheering. We have no similar organization in this country and it was good to know that somewhere in the world there was still one that had that much pride in the theatre, that much regard for the drama, and that much faith and determination. These excellent attributes should not, however, have blinded criticism, which properly is realistic and concerned only with the business directly in hand. It may and it assuredly does respect the qualities noted, but that respect is a side issue and

can have no bearing on any appraisal of actual performance. It was thus that, while the critic fully appreciated the quality of ambition and resolve that animated the company, he was perforce brought to dismiss it when he sat himself down to analyze its immediate achievements.

In the case of the Chekhov play, the company's performance once again was sorely lacking and in fair truth on the whole not to be compared with that contributed to the local stage some years ago by the Broadway commercial producer, Jed Harris. The direction by Mr. Burrell was again amiss, so portentously extended, slow and pauseful that one got the feeling that O'Neill's five-hour *Strange Interlude* might handily have been played *in toto* between the reading of the lines. Mr. Burrell, furthermore, apparently has not learned that sound direction consists in establishing the essential temperament of such a play and its characters, thereupon abjuring a constant emphasis of it, and permitting an audience to sense it for itself without being beaten over the head with it. When, as here, he throughout the evening unrelievedly struck the note of the characters' boredom, and amplified it with yawns and groans, the boredom naturally seeped out of the characters across the footlights into the auditorium.

With the exception of Olivier's Astrov and the attractively pictorial Yelena of Margaret Leighton, the acting was further damaging to the play, which, being perhaps Chekhov's weakest, has need of all the help it can get. Richardson's Vanya was merely his Falstaff with a hang-over; Nicholas Hannen's Professor, except for the longer whiskers, suggested Hedda's Tesman as he might be played by George Jessel; the Telyegin of George Relph missed any real sense of the character; the Sonya of Joyce Redman, who shone as Doll Tearsheet the previous week, needed only a white nightgown and a flight of stairs to fit perfectly into Frances Hodgson Burnett; and the rest were just a little this side of nowhere.

One observed that in this case, as in the two previous presentations, though the performances were by any reputable critical standard not what they should have been,

they nevertheless were found highly acceptable by many on the peculiar ground that the roles' incumbents were what is known in theatrical lingo as "versatile." That is, that they were able to appear in various quite different parts in various quite different plays. While it is to be granted that such versatility is theatrically interesting, it is not, alas, always dramatically and critically satisfactory. It may be very entertaining to see an actor one night as Timon of Athens, the night after as Gregers Werle and the night after that as Charley's Aunt, but it may also and coincidentally be a trifle disturbing to critical contemplation of him. There have been, true, actors who have been able to play a variety of roles with considerable skill, but their number has not been luxuriant. In the more usual run, the actor who is first-rate in one kind of role is something less than that in another and very considerably less than that in another still.

Versatility, as it is called, is furthermore often that merely in a superficial sense; while it may extend to voice, carriage, manner and, above all, makeup, it fails to extend to inner character composition and inner spirit. As we generally get it in the contemporary theatre, it amounts at bottom to little more, one suspects, than Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde played on separate evenings instead of on one. And it is much as Jekyll enthralls the groundlings when he slides behind the tall chair and emerges with whiskers and black court-plaster on his teeth and then as Hyde enthralls them all over again when he removes the whiskers and court-plaster that the majority of *soi disant* versatile actors operate to like ends.

People, however, are generally inclined to be over-liberal and to make uncritical allowances in the instance of repertory companies. In the case of the stock companies that once flourished throughout the land the liberality and allowances went to such extremes, as oldsters will remember, that some of the worst hams out of captivity — players like, say, Creston Clarke, Vaughan Glaser, Thurston Hall, Edmund Breese, *et al.* — actually came to be regarded as remarkable artists and the peers of Henry Irving and Ol-

iver Doud Byron simply on the score of their ability one week to walk erect as Virginius and the next with stooped shoulders and a limp as Shylock. This same liberality, founded on the belief that it is little short of miraculous that an actor can make himself look different on two successive appearances and genuinely miraculous if he can do it on three, undoubtedly extended to the Old Vic company, though surely no invidious comparison with the aforesaid stock companies is intended. But, unless I am sadly mistaken, what this Old Vic troupe amounts to is little more than two variably talented and honest actors, Olivier and Richardson, surrounded by anything but a noteworthy group, and directed not too ably in stage settings which for the most part look as if they had come down from an old Benson provincial company.

The actors' pronunciations continued to grieve the sensitive ear. They should have been instructed out of such as "cawnversation," "forist," "melancully," "climit," "dawcter," "meegraine," "imposseeble," etc. The staging of the storm scene might also have profited by having the thunder sound less as if Gene Krupa had taken over the business of Thor. And the old Constance Garnett translation of the play, stiff with literality, might better have been replaced by that of Rose Caylor.

In extenuation of their disappointment over the performances of the company, some in the local theatregoing body alleged it to be due to too much advance ballyhooing and the consequent raising of too high expectations. This struck one as not only a pretty weak apology but, more, as unwitting criticism and reproof of the complainants. What ballyhooing there was was very much less that from outside sources than that which sprang from the snobbish psychology of the complainants themselves. These grunTERS are for the most part label lovers and, when it comes to the theatre, foreign label lovers in particular and English label lovers in double particular. Thus, in this case, the mere high and elegant sound of the label Old Vic was enough to induce in them preliminary ecstasies, quite as a decade before the label D'Oyly Carte, though attached to a second-

rate English provincial touring company, persuaded them to similar anticipatory spasms. The Old Vic label, though borrowed at considerable distance from the Old Vic of another day and age, painted in their minds pictures of majestic wonder in the same further way that the label Abbey Theatre, though affixed to an inferior company, some seasons ago took them in and subsequently rolled them on their backs. They are, these virgins, kith and kin to those who shelled out twenty-five dollars during the Prohibition period for a bottle of Scotch in the fond conviction that it must be the genuine article because the words "Very Old" appeared on the label, along with a woodcut of Macbeth.

The English, unlike these fellow citizens of ours, are not such gulls when it comes to the theatre. They may in the past have licked their chops in advance over certain French companies that came to London, but in later years they have become realists from their fair isle's equivalent of Missouri. They are willing to be shown, but they do not jump self-hypnotized to conclusions beforehand. Let an actor or actress or company or playwright from America or France or Russia or anywhere else invite their attention and, while they will courteously provide it, they will still reserve their opinion until the facts are presented to them. It is not, certainly, that their opinion is always correct, but it at least is not arbitrarily predicated on any such sycophancy as operates amongst our Froebelian genuflectionists.

That, despite the latter's disappointment, some of the Old Vic label glue stubbornly adhered to them was clearly demonstrated at the opening of the company's third bill. Though improvement was critically noticeable and though the plays of the occasion, Sophocles' *Ædipus* in the Yeats translation and Sheridan's *The Critic*, got a better direction deal from Michel Saint-Denis and Miles Malleon respectively than the previous exhibits had got from Burrell, the presentations, aside from Olivier's worthy account of himself in both plays and interesting performances by Mr. Malleon and George Relph in the second, were of no especial distinction. Without Olivier to spark them, they would have been largely run-of-the-mill. In the case of *The*

*Critic*, indeed, failure to visit the share of cuts which were abruptly visited on the play within the play itself and which extended the Sheridan joke out of all proportion to the modern stage caused even Olivier and his several able colleagues to find the going difficult. But so determined was the attending congregation in self-defense to minimize its disappointment in the aggregate and to justify itself for its adoration of label that it laboriously worked itself up, like a dollar cuckoo clock, to enough chirping of bravos to have sufficed Sophocles' Greek theatre in its heyday or Sheridan's Drury Lane in its.

Surveying the company, it becomes more or less plain that, for all its designation as a repertory acting troupe, it is built mainly around a star actor and that that actor is Olivier. In the five plays it showed us, Olivier was the star, in the Broadway sense, in all but one. Though Richardson was the star in that one, the second part of *Henry IV*, he played second fiddle to Hotspur in the first part, second fiddle to Astrov in *Uncle Vanya*, since the doctor's role is theatrically much showier than the name role, third fiddle as Tiresias in *Ædipus*, and tenth fiddle as Lord Burleigh in *The Critic* to Mr. Puff. It was thus that, apart from Richardson's Falstaff in the second section of *Henry*, Olivier bore the standard of the company and that, without him, it would have tumbled to the ground.

People, ever eager to see the best in repertory, are, however, usually *gobemouches* in their quest of satisfying reasons. They found them here, they pleased themselves to think, in the circumstance that Olivier in the second part of *Henry* played the minor role of Shallow, that Richardson played minor roles in *Ædipus* and *The Critic*, that Nicholas Hannen turned from King Henry to a Russian professor and then to a mere Greek chorus leader and a character in a burlesque show; and that other members of the troupe also played relatively important roles one night and markedly subsidiary the next. The *gobemouches'* admiration for the actors was based, however, not on the quality of their performances but rather, unless my guess is bad, on their likable willingness to play secondary or

tertiary roles or even lesser when they were asked to. The humble thereby inherited the earth, since it is well known from long experience of audiences that they will always mistake a show of modesty in an actor for an increased hidden virtuosity and that, if an actor who has made a name for himself in, say, Shakespeare indicates that he is not enamoured of himself by condescending to appear as the butler in a Pinero play, they will shower their respect and good-will on him, even if he drops the tray on Mrs. Tanqueray.

While repeating that the company showed itself to much better advantage in its last two offerings, I still have the critical honor to believe that, ballyhoo or no ballyhoo, it is what I have hitherto described it as being, which is to say an only fairish troupe headed by the competent and commendable Olivier and the at times competent and commendable Richardson, along with a few serviceable supporting players, and on the whole nothing to set the Thames or the Hudson on fire.

The pronunciations of the ensemble in the final exhibit continued still to chafe the ear, among them such as "gawt," "certin," "markit," "subjict," "heeyah," "hatrid," "approachis," "supportid," "prawfits," "nawnsense," etc.

## ON WHITMAN AVENUE. MAY 8, 1946

*A play by Maxine Wood. Produced by Canada Lee and Mark Marvin in association with George McLain for 148 forced, cut-rate performances in the Cort Theatre.*

## PROGRAM

JOHNNIE TILDEN	Martin Miller	TONI TILDEN	Perry Wilson
KATE TILDEN	Ernestine Barrier	DAVID BENNETT	Canada Lee
ED TILDEN	Will Geer	JEFF HALL	Philip Clarke
OWEN BENNETT	Richard Williams	BELLE HALL	Betty Greene Little
GRAMP BENNETT	Augustus Smith	WALTER LUND	Robert Simon
WINI BENNETT	Vivienne Baber	ELLEN LUND	Jean Cleveland
BERNIE LUND	Kenneth Terry	WILBUR REED	Stephen Roberts
AURIE ANDERSON	Hilda Vaughn	EDNA REED	Joanna Albus
CORA BENNETT	Abbie Mitchell		

SYNOPSIS: *The entire action of the play takes place in the Tildens' home in Lawndale, a suburban development in the mid-West. Act I. Scene 1. September, 1945, about 5 p.m. Scene 2. Dusk, a few hours later. Act II. Scene 1. Five days later, about 5 p.m. Scene 2. Late afternoon of the next day.*

Director: Margo Jones.

THE PLEA drama here again befell us, in this instance once again sternly arguing with us that we give the Negroes a very dirty deal, as if the Negroes and we did not already sufficiently know it. The injunction was furthermore imparted in a play so poor that it is to be feared that the cut-rate audiences who attended were not much impressed with its truth, in fact, were waywardly inclined to speculate whether this constant, indignant dramatic harping on the subject was possibly motivated somewhat less by righteousness than by a feeling that it constituted sensational box-office material, which repetition of it has proved that it does not.

The present author's asperity was funneled through the plot of a Negro family which has been rented the upper floor of a house in a Mid-Western town by the liberal



daughter of a white family while the latter is away. The wrath of the white neighbors and the hostility of her supposedly liberal mother results in the eviction of the blacks, and sends them on their homeless, hopeless way. The writing relied for force largely upon quotations from Walt Whitman (with for comedy relief a character's inquiry "Does he live around here?"), upon such stencils as "If one Negro comes, others will follow," and upon such red-fire as "If men can fight and die together, they should be able to live in peace together" and "If a Negro can die for his country, he ought to be able to live in it." The theatrical cards were further stacked by casting competent Negro actors in the black roles and indifferent white actors in the white. But the hoped for general effect missed not only because of amateurish dramaturgy but because from long previous experience an audience knew perfectly well in advance everything that was going to be said and was going to happen, even that when the small colored boy would proudly show the small white boy a toy airplane he had made, the latter would venomously throw it to the ground and stamp on it.

The last year was a trying one for us theatrical pleaphobes. No sooner had we got one plea out of our ears than another was shoved into them. *Foxhole In The Parlor* started the business with a plea for the exorcism of wars; *The Private Life Of The Master Race* kept it going with a plea against Nazism, which may be allowed to have been also slightly gratuitous; and *Deep Are The Roots* followed with a plea for justice to the Negro. *The Assassin* was then propelled at us with a plea that all good men stand shoulder to shoulder against the world's political evils; *Seven Mirrors* belabored us with a plea that women join up with the men; and *Skydrift* beseeched us not to forget the dead soldiers who had sacrificed themselves for us and, it now looks, for the rosy estate of Russia. *The Rugged Path* bombarded us with a plea against national complacency; *State Of The Union* had at us with one against power politics; and *Strange Fruit*, just to make certain that we had not missed the point in the case of *Deep Are The*

*Roots*, assailed us again with a plea for the equality of our black fellow nationals. Then *A Young American*, to make doubly certain we had not missed it in the instance of *Strange Fruit*, repeated it, as a little later on, to make triply certain, did *Jeb. Dunnigan's Daughter* for a slight change thereupon pleaded against the evils of capitalism; *Antigone* pleaded, or thought it did, against dictatorships; *Walk Hard* returned to the misery of the Negro; and *This, Too, Shall Pass* pleaded against Semitic prejudice. It may be that you are the sort of person who likes nothing better when you go to the theatre than to listen to dramatized newspaper editorials and brochures of the various cause committees. If you are, go and have the time of your life. But as for me, I am afraid that I am a bird of another feather. Most such plays pall the pantaloons off me, and in the higher interests of dramatic culture I reserve my favor for the kind that do not heatedly argue a damned thing but calmly reserve their literary skill, their intelligence, their wit, and their educated emotion for the delineation not of tabloid hawkers and soapbox redheads but of God's somewhat less vociferous and more impressive human beings.

In this general regard, I feel toward the drama and playwrights as W. S. Maugham feels toward the novel and novelists. Says he, "If readers wish to inform themselves of the pressing problems of the day they will do better to read, not novels, but the books that specifically deal with them. There is no reason why a novelist should be anything but a novelist. He should know a little about a great many things, but it is unnecessary, and sometimes even harmful, for him to be a specialist in any particular subject. The novelist need not eat a whole sheep to know what mutton tastes like; it is enough if he eats a chop. Then by the exercise of his imagination and his creative faculty he should be able to give you a very good idea of an Irish stew, but when on the strength of the chop he has eaten he goes on to give you his views on sheep raising, the wool industry and the political situation in Australia I think it is well to accept them with reserve. . . . It is enough for a novelist

to be a good novelist. It is unnecessary for him to be a prophet, a preacher, a politician, or a leader of thought. Fiction is an art and the purpose of art is not to instruct, but to please. If in many quarters this is not acknowledged, I can only suppose it is because of the unfortunate impression so widely held that there is something disreputable in pleasure. But that is stuff and nonsense. Pleasure is good. All pleasure is good."

Hallelujah!

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 SWAN SONG. MAY 15, 1946

*A melodrama by Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur, re-written from one called Crescendo by Ramon Romero and Harriett Hinsdale. Produced by John Glein for 155 forced, cut-rate performances in the Booth Theatre.*

## PROGRAM

LOUISE KUBIN	Marianne Stewart	KATYA	Kasia Orzazewski
TITOCH	Ivan Simpson	SISTER AGATHA	Leni Stengel
ERIC MOORE	Scott McKay	MAX VONZELL	Harry Sothern
STELLA HEMINGWAY	Mary Servoss	GUSTAV WEXLER	Louis Sorin
VICTOR REMEZOFF		OSCAR MUTZENBAUER	Rand Elliot
	Michael Dalmatoff	RUTH TREFON	Barbara Perry
STANISLAUS KUBIN	Theo Goetz	DR. CORBETT	Owen Coll
VERA NOVAK	Jacqueline Horner	CAPTAIN BARTOW	Arthur L. Sachs
LEO POLLARD	David Ellin	NURSE	Mary Jones

SYNOPSIS: Act I. *The entire action takes place in the Long Island living-room of Stanislaus Kubin. Time: The present.* Act II. Scene 1. *Three weeks later. Morning.* Scene 2. *That evening.* Act III. *Later that evening.*

Director: Joseph Pevney.

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AS WRITTEN by the original authors, the play, which closed after a brief road tryout, was a so-called psychological murder thriller that failed because, among other things, its thrill element, such as it was, was underwritten and unpromoted by its dialogue. In the revision by the Messrs. Hecht and MacArthur, it fails because, among other things, the dialogue is so overwritten that it unbuilds that same thrill element. There is so much talk, most of it of that pretentious flavor common to various Hollywood screen writers who return to playwriting, that it would minimize the agitation naturally inherent in even the sixty-three murders by the late French Bluebeard, M. Marcel Petiot. Since in this case there is actually only one, and that committed long before the play begins, the dramatic consequences may be appreciated.

The original play, which had also been shown on the West Coast in 1943, while a defaulting one, aimed simply at the story of an untalented and psychotic pianist who, suffering from a persecution complex, does away, first, with his sister pianist who seems to stand in his career's path and, secondly, tries to do the same with a young girl whom his teacher has taken under wing in place of him. The revisionists, while sticking to the theme, have aimed rather at lifting the occasion into some size by loading it with materials gleaned from a drugstore "Dictionary Of Music And Musicians" and have made what might have been rewritten into an effective commercial thriller pompously ridiculous. Their dramaturgy, in addition, is of the kind whose exposition is expansive enough to substitute for a Philadelphia Sesquicentennial, and their "plants" so profuse that the shop of Wadley and Smythe would not be sufficiently large to contain them. They further ventilate some philosophies of art apparently derived from the not always too scrupulously proof-read Haldeman-Julius five-cent little Blue Books, along with their now familiar and somewhat worn animadversions on critics, among the latter such sexual bombshells as "Critics are incapable of love or of being loved." And they approach each of their exhibit's potential thrill moments with so much dawdling preparation and so many stage directions to the switchboard electrician that when the moments come the effect is much like waiting impatiently for a provocative girl to show up for an appointment and, after cooling one's heels for an hour, having her grandmother show up in her place.

MacArthur was once a talented writer, both in the matter of the plays he collaborated on with Edward Sheldon, Sidney Howard and Hecht and in the short story form, as anyone who read such of his excellent tales as *Rope* will recall. And so, too, was Hecht. What has befallen MacArthur, I do not know; all that he has been able to accomplish in later years has been a poor revision of a play, in collaboration with Hecht, retitled *Ladies And Gentlemen*, and an even poorer independent effort called *Johnny On A Spot*. Hecht, in turn, as author in his early years of the

highly amusing comedy, *The Egotist*, and as co-author with MacArthur somewhat later of that best of all newspaper farces, *The Front Page*, and that gay theatrical travesty, *Twentieth Century*, also made a position for himself in the theatre. Hollywood then lured him with its copious mazumas to the post of movie scenario writer.

Time passed and, now rich, he deemed it meet to regain his lost pride in a return to his old love. He came back and wrote *To Quito And Back*, which had nothing of his former talent in it and which failed both critically and commercially. He betook himself sadly to Hollywood once again, but presently the old urge was once more upon him. Again he came back and wrote *Lily Of The Valley*, which indicated even less of his former capacity and which failed in both directions even more signally. Then still again he returned to Hollywood and, still again full of scarlet indignation over his defeat, blaming everyone, including all the critics, save himself. But the old urge did not desert him, and yet once again he returned to write this *Swan Song*, which duly once again has failed and whose failure duly once again he charges to the same critics.

What was it that Hollywood did and has done to Hecht, as it has done to many others like him? If at this point you expect from me an extended treatise embracing all the familiar things from the corruption of too easy money to the false standards of the films and from the corruption of the Hollywood mind to the imposed surrender of artistic integrity, you are doomed to disappointment, fortunately for you. I content myself rather with a single exhibit, itself both retroactively and presently illuminating enough, culled from the newspaper column of Mr. Sidney Skolsky, Hollywood's eminent Boswell:

Ben Hecht, who is now writing the picture, *China Girl*, has had his entire office redecorated to keep in the mood. Most writers' offices at Twentieth Century-Fox are white with two overhanging lights. But not Hecht's. His is remodeled to resemble a Chinese den and is now a dark blue with bright red drapes. He has lights on the walls, and a small Oriental rug at

the foot of a red and overstuffed chair. Also in the office is a Chinese gong, which he uses when he wants to call his secretary. He does not use the ordinary buzzer but hits the gong with a tom-tom. The gong is near a flat Oriental table which he uses for a desk. It was after lunch time when I arrived but Hecht was having lunch in his den with a guest. For lunch he and his guest were having chop suey, Hecht eating his with chop-sticks. "I am trying to stay in the mood and period of my story," explained Hecht.

The leading role in *Swan Song* was occupied by a twelve-year-old girl whose ability to play the piano was confused by a number of the critics with general acting ability and who received such encomiums from them on the latter score as might have tickled the life out of Ada Rehan at the age of fifty. The critical phenomenon was not and is not new to the theatre world. Let an actress, young or old and however indifferent, be able to do some unexpected thing and many critics will peculiarly persuade themselves that the extra accomplishment is a guarantee of her histrionic merit. We engaged the reaction so far back as 1909 when a third-rate player named Leona Watson, who was never heard of afterwards, appeared in Edward Locke's drama *The Climax* and, simply because she could sing, was endorsed as an actress of almost Bernhardt proportions. We engaged it again when, in a revival of the same play seventeen years later, another third-rate actress named Dorothy Francis, who similarly was never heard of afterwards, enjoyed the same critical rewards. And we have periodically engaged it since then. If I were an actress who could not act, I should profit from such critical experience, learn how to play a xylophone, learn to play it while standing on my head, learn to sing Tosti's "Goodbye" while in that position, and get such eulogies from the critics as would make Rachel, Réjane and Duse turn green with envy in their tombs.

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## ANNIE GET YOUR GUN. MAY 16, 1946

*A musical comedy by Herbert and Dorothy Fields, with music and lyrics by Irving Berlin. Produced by Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II for the rest of the season's performances in the Imperial Theatre.*

## PROGRAM

LITTLE BOY	Clifford Sales	WAITER	Leon Bibb
LITTLE GIRL	Mary Ellen Glass	PORTER	Clyde Turner
CHARLIE DAVENPORT	Marty May	RIDING MISTRESS	Lubov Roudenko
IRON TAIL	Daniel Nagrin	MAJOR GORDON	LILLIE (Pawnee Bill)
YELLOW FOOT	Walter John		George Lipton
MAC	Cliff Dunstan	CHIEF SITTING BULL	
	Rob Taylor		Harry Bellaver
COWBOYS	Bernard Griffin	MABEL	Mary Woodley
	Jack Pierce	LOUISE	Ostrid Lind
	Mary Grey	NANCY	Dorothy Richards
COWGIRLS	Franca Baldwin	ANDY TURNER	Earl Sauvain
FOSTER WILSON	Art Barnett	CLYDE SMITH	Victor Clarke
COOLIE	Beau Tilden	JOHN	Rob Taylor
DOLLY TATE	Lea Penman	FREDDIE	Robert Dixon
WINNIE TATE	Betty Anne Nyman	WILD HORSE	Daniel Nagrin
TOMMY KEELER	Kenny Bowers	PAWNEE'S MESSENGER	Walter John
FRANK BUTLER	Ray Middleton	MR. SCHUYLER ADAMS	
GIRL WITH BOUQUET			Don Liberto
	Katrina Van Oss	MRS. SCHUYLER ADAMS	
ANNIE OAKLEY	Ethel Merman		Dorothy Richards
MINNIE	Nancy Jean Raab	DR. PERCY FERGUSON	
JESSIE	Camilla De Witt		Bernard Griffin
NELLIE	Marlene Cameron	MRS. PERCY FERGUSON	
LITTLE JAKE	Bobby Hookey		Marietta Vore
HARRY	Don Liberto	DEBUTANTE	Ruth Vrana
MARY	Ellen Hanley	MR. ERNEST HENDERSON	
COL. WM. F. CODY	(Buffalo Bill)		Art Barnett
	William O'Neal	MRS. ERNEST HENDERSON	
MRS. LITTLE HORSE	Alma Ross		Truly Barbara
MRS. BLACK TOOTH		SYLVIA POTTER-PORTER	
	Elizabeth Malone		Marjorie Crossland
MRS. YELLOW FOOT	Nellie Ranson	MR. CLAY	Rob Taylor
TRAINMAN	John Garth III	MR. LOCKWOOD	Fred Rivett

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Scene 1. *The Wilson House, a summer hotel on the outskirts of Cincinnati, Ohio.* Scene 2. *A Pullman parlor in an*



*overland steam train. Six weeks later. Scene 3. The Fair Grounds at Minneapolis, Minn. A few days later. Scene 3a. The arena of the Big Tent. Scene 4. A dressing-room tent. The same day. Scene 5. The arena of the Big Tent. Later that night. Act II. Scene 1. The deck of a cattle boat. Eight months later. Scene 2. Ballroom of the Hotel Brevoort. The next night. Scene 3. Aboard a ferry. Enroute to Governor's Island. Next morning. Scene 4. Governor's Island. Near the Fort. Immediately following.*

Director: Joshua Logan.

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THE WORLD in the last century has enjoyed (if that is not too strong a word) a number of proficient dramatic critics and the critics have no doubt surely enjoyed (if that is not too weak a word) themselves. But there have been, as always there will be, certain occasions when their pleasure has been considerably qualified. Those occasions have been when duty has compelled them to review musical shows. The shows may at times have amused them greatly, but the business of reviewing them in a manner to interest not only themselves but, more importantly, their readers has become in repetition so onerous that the very anticipation of the chore has rid seeing even the better shows of much of their cheer and stimulation. In the beginning, when a critic has just embarked on his career, the thing is easy, that is, if he has any natural gift for his job. He can approach the subject with some originality, brio and freshness. But, as the years pass and show after show comes under his pen, his novelty of approach and expression, and with it any lift and bounce, becomes dissipated in the fog of most of the shows' general sameness. Even the best critics soon bog down under the strain. The lesser, of course, tumble by the wayside long before.

For one critic who knows enough about music relevantly to distinguish between, say, Gershwin's "Rhapsody In Blue" and Saint-Saëns' "Samson and Delilah" and is hence able to write something a little more piquant about the shows, there are a dozen who mechanically drone such descriptives as "melodious," "lilting" and "catchy" about a score and leave readers wondering if their reviews are not

written in bulk and with spaces simply to be filled in with the composers' names. And for one who knows anything about the art of the dance beyond a rapt appreciation of tap dancers who can cross their feet without falling down there are another dozen who are lost when they try to go farther than the accepted reviewing pattern with its "spirited dancing," "graceful choreography," and "lively ensemble numbers."

There is even more trouble. Since four out of every five shows are basically as alike as so many peas and later day romantic historical novels, and since the music in them is often that in name only and the dancing confined mostly to third-rate ballets, neo-Ned Wayburn chorus routines and the aforesaid tapping, there is no place for even the better reviewer to exercise his critical faculties and, like the lesser, he has to parrot what remains the same old stuff. If he has any respect for himself, he can not fill space in telling the show's plot, since that is all too plainly the refuge of the lazy and cheating critic and since the plot frequently is at bottom largely the same as in other shows and, even when a bit different, not worth telling anyway.

What is left to the poor fellow? He can not get away with a mere statement of his opinion that the show is good, or bad, or medium, and stop there. He has space to fill and fill it he must. If he is handy with the language and has a knack for *mot* and phrase, he may rewrite the old, familiar reviews in a fashion that makes them superficially deceptive, at least to such readers as can not see through the dodge. He may even on rare occasions, when the liquor has been unwontedly inspirational, be seized with a fresh idea or two. But in the general run he is a helpless stereotype, fit only to be read by half-wits and other despairful and comfort-seeking critics.

Having written at least a thousand reviews of musicals during the long course of my critical operations, I accordingly find myself in the present case in the usual predicament. While the show is an over-all amusing one, its music is scarcely of the species that provides one with any opportunity to be either instructive or entertaining in a musico-

logical direction, and its dancing, including the tap numbers, follows so closely the established patterns that it similarly opens up no avenue for a parade of such choreographic wisdom as one may possess. I therefore content myself with suggesting merely the plot's skeleton: the love of Annie Oakley, the crack rifle-shot of the old Buffalo Bill show, for Frank Butler, the crack rifle-shot of the old Pawnee Bill show, and their eventual confluence when the two shows that have had equally hard sledding merge; along with the information that Ethel Merman and Ray Middleton are first-rate in the leading roles; that, while the book is hardly notable for any wit, it has at least the color of distance and traces of incidental humor; that Jo Mielziner's settings and Lucinda Ballard's costumes, if not Helen Tamaris' dance arrangements, contribute pleasantly to the stage picture; and that several of Irving Berlin's lyrics — his tunes are below par — enjoy a measure of acceptable waggishness, notably "Show Business," "Who Do You Love, I Hope?," and "They Say It's Wonderful." Among the other better items is the droll Sitting Bull of Harry Bellaver whose one rule, he sternly grunts, is never to invest a cent in show business and who is miserably downcast that he can't raise any crops on his land because it is so full of oil.

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## COME MARCHING HOME. MAY 18, 1946

*A play by Robert Anderson. Produced by the Blackfriars' Guild for 23 performances in the Blackfriars' Theatre.*

### PROGRAM

ROBERT HUGHES	<i>Robert Fierman</i>	JOHN BOSWORTH	<i>Clark Howat</i>
SARAH BLIVEN	<i>Jean Lovelace</i>	JOE ZACCANINO	
PROFESSOR CUNNINGHAM			<i>Thomas G. Monahan</i>
	<i>Edwin C. Hugh</i>	MRS. BOSWORTH, SR.	
MRS. COMSTOCK	<i>Florence Brown</i>		<i>Florence Pendleton</i>
ANTOINETTE BOSWORTH		CHESTER POWELL	<i>James Rafferty</i>
	<i>Inge Adams</i>	DR. BELMONT	<i>Frank Ford</i>

**SYNOPSIS:** *The action of the play takes place in the living-room of the Bosworths' cottage just outside a small eastern city. The time is the present. Act I. Scene 1. Late afternoon of an autumn day. Scene 2. Later the same evening. Act II. Scene 1. Morning some time later. Scene 2. After dinner two weeks later. Act III. Scene 1. After lunch the next day. Scene 2. Early the same evening.*

Director: *Dennis Gurney.*

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**R**ETURNED SERVICEMEN, of whom Mr. Anderson is one, seem determined, and understandably, to write plays about themselves and their kind. The plays are usually of two sorts: (a) those in which the protagonist upon his return in the flesh seeks to orient and re-establish himself and finds to his disgust that conditions, despite the war, have not only not improved but deteriorated and that the forces of evil are still operating in the land; and (b) those in which he returns as a uniformed ghost and finds much the same thing or, if the playwright thinks he can ultimately persuade a producer to hire a little off-stage music, learns wistfully that life is for the living and that, though his old friends remember him with affection, he must be content to remain a spook. The present author's play falls into the first group. Its story, broadly reminiscent of *State Of The Union* and its stems in the bygone Broadhurst-Belasco period, is about a returned naval officer who is reluctantly in-

duced to run for the office of State senator, who encounters bitter opposition from the local corrupt political machine, whose original reluctance changes to grim determination when the machine employs various foul tactics against him, who is deserted even by those who have been his supporters on the ground that his ideals do not impress them as being sufficiently pragmatic, but who, though faced by certain defeat, remains in the race with the promise that, come what may, they have not heard the last of him and that he will persevere in future campaigns until he has awakened the public to the need for clean politics.

The play, while hot with honest conviction, misses by virtue of its rabble-rouser writing and its author's inability to make its theme proceed naturally from his characters. It is the author rather than the latter who seems to occupy the stage. The net result is consequently much less drama than a forum harangue.

The play won first prize in the previous year's competition sponsored by the National Theatre Conference for overseas servicemen. In a letter to me before it opened, Mr. Anderson observed, "The war took me out of the rut of academic life and sent me to the far corners of the earth. I persisted with my playwriting, however, and in 1944 wrote this play. At that time I thought that I was being most daring to write a post-war play, but I should have known that a nation which buys its morning papers the night before and its Monday magazines the preceding Thursday would be tired of the post-war theme before the war was over."

Unfortunately for his play, Mr. Anderson was right.

## AROUND THE WORLD. MAY 31, 1946

*A musical extravaganza, based on Jules Verne's Around The World In Eighty Days, by Orson Welles, with music and lyrics by Cole Porter. Produced by Mercury Productions for 74 performances in the Adelphi Theatre.*

## CAST

Orson Welles, Arthur Margetson, Mary Healy, Julie Warren, Larry Laurence, Victoria Cordova, Brainerd Duffield, Guy Spaull, Jack Pitchon, Nathan Baker, Myron Speth, Gordon West, Genevieve Sauris, Stefan Schnabel, Bernard Savage, Billy Howell, Bruce Cartwright, Dorothy Bird, Lucas Aco, Eddy Di Genova, Victor Savidge, Stanley Turner, Spencer James, James, Arthur Cohen, and Phil King.

Director: Orson Welles.

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**I**F A PRODUCER WANTS to lend a suggestion of reasonable continuity to some such succession of dissociated vaudeville acts as a trained Russian bear, an Egyptian hoochie-coochie dancer and a pair of Irish comedians who spill potato soup over each other, and wants to get away with charging six dollars instead of the old Palace two, I suppose that recourse to Verne's familiar travelogue scheme is one way out. Not only does it without further strain on his imagination automatically provide the necessary variety of scenes to fit the acts, but it provides also that elemental pursuit business which has been a steady meal-ticket for the movies since the remote days of D. W. Griffith and which periodically has fascinated even the theatre trade since the remoter days of Lincoln J. Carter. Mr. Welles here laid hold of the scheme for a show which, though it did not contain the Russian bear and the Irish comedians, contained not only the Egyptian belly-shaker but almost everything else from Japanese circus acrobats and an elephant to the Indian rope trick and the flying eagle out of Edwin Arden's old melodrama, *The Eagle's Nest*. So much of my memory as survives the potpourri reflects that

about the only thing he failed to include was Blanche Yurka.

Years ago, the dramatic critic on the old New York *Evening Post* was an elderly Englishman named J. Ranken Towse. Mr. Towse was famous for three things. Whatever the play he was reviewing, whether by Shakespeare, Ibsen or some Broadway pigeon-feeder, he seldom neglected to work in an affectionate reference to Sadler's Wells, where rumor had it that in youth he had once proudly carried a spear. Secondly, he confected the most voluminous daily reviews ever heard of in cosmic journalism, often expending five thousand words on some flea-bite which his critical contemporaries properly dismissed with four thousand seven hundred and fifty less. And, thirdly, he was so great a virtuoso of the on-the-one-hand-but-then-on-the-other-hand school of criticism that nine times out of ten no one, doubtless including himself, could make head or tail of just where he stood.

In the present case, I fear that my name must be, in at least one direction, Towse, Jr. On the one hand, this *Around The World* did not come off, but then on the other hand it did. It was amusing, and it was not amusing. It entertained, and it did not entertain. Disentangling one's reactions was a confounding exercise. One moment one was humored and the next one wasn't. What the show seemed to amount to was essentially the *Around The World In Eighty Days* which was produced in Niblo's Garden sixty-one years before and here embroidered with the moving pictures, sliding platforms, loud speakers, etc., which Piscator employed in his *Hoppla, Wir Leben!* in the pre-Hitler theatre of Berlin, and with the spoof vouchsafed the beer-and-pretzel melodramas by Christopher Morley in Hoboken, New Jersey, and by John Krimsky in a Manhattan side-street boozehall back in the Coolidge and Hoover eras. Emerging from it all was a kind of transplanted Drury Lane Christmas season show for Olsen and Johnson's children. If you dressed yourself in an Eton collar, it was some mild fun. If you didn't, it probably all seemed

something like the Old Vic's *Uncle Vanya* with tunes by Cole Porter.

Welles, whatever was going on behind him at the hands of the fifty-five stagehands, upon whom the show with its ceaseless shifting of scenery and wealth of properties imposed a job to stagger five hundred and fifty-five multipotent beavers, was the occasion's mainstay. He was on the stage so continuously that the excessive star role in *Dream Girl* seemed in comparison a mere walk-on. When he was not in one fantastic disguise he was in another, and when he was *in propria persona* he was in operation with a rapid-fire magic act that in ten minutes dispersed more amazing appearing and disappearing tricks than Herrmann, Kellar and Thurston retailed in their combined careers. He was Fregoli, De Vries, Ching Ling Foo, Louis B. Mayer and Welles rolled into one. The rolling was good; it was only a pity that the Bull Durham was not more plentiful.

Being in the critical tobacco business, I suggest to him a possibly wiser course for him to have pursued. If he wished to build a show around any such wildly diversified series of acts and dance numbers — Arabian, Indian, Chinese, Japanese, English, American, etc. — he might better than resorting to the stale Verne plan have adopted one of the best revue notions that the theatre has experienced, to wit, that which the illustrious and witty Rip utilized at the Marigny in Paris some twenty-five or so years ago. It would have served his purposes handsomely. Rip's idea was of a young man and his sweetheart who quarrel and part. The young man, in a desperate effort to forget her, takes off on a trip 'round the world which brings him to all the countries to which Verne brought Phileas Fogg. In each land he determinedly seeks in the arms of a fair young woman banishment from memory of the picture of the girl he left behind. But each and every girl is that same girl in other complexion, hair-do, and costume.

The Porter song numbers, below his earlier level, fell mainly into two categories: (a) the "Should I Tell You I Love You?" kind which customarily generate a mutual



amorous reaction in the hands of the sentimental male and female of the species; and (b) the travesty "Wherever They Fly The Flag Of Old England" kind which have shown up for some years now whenever a group of ambitious amateurs succeed in raising a few thousand dollars and put on what they describe as a musical satire which they fondly imagine will pale the memories of Gilbert and Sullivan.

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## SECOND BEST BED. JUNE 3, 1946

*A comedy by N. Richard Nash. Produced by Ruth Chatterton and John Huntington for 8 performances in the Barrymore Theatre.*

### PROGRAM

BALLAD SELLER		THE BEADLE	Max Stamm
	Richard Dyer-Bennet	WILL SHAKESPEARE	Barry Thomson
NELLS GARRIS	Elizabeth Eustis	MASTER YARROW	John McKee
FENNY BRUSHELL	Peter Boyne	FARMER LEGGE	Jefferson Coates
YORICK	Ralph Cullinan	MICHAEL, THE TAVERN KEEPER	
ANNE HATHAWAY	SHAKESPEARE		Ralph Sumpter
	Ruth Chatterton	HARELIP BEN	John Gay
LEWIS POGGS	Ralph Forbes		
SQUIRE SIMON LUMMLE			
	Richard Temple		

**SYNOPSIS:** *The entire action of the play takes place in the combination "main room" and "parlor" in Anne Hathaway's cottage, Shottery, parish of old Stratford-on-Avon, county of Warwickshire. Act I. A day in early June. Mid-morning. Act II. The next day. Toward night-fall. Act III. Early the next morning.*

**Time:** *The beginning of the seventeenth century.*

**Directors:** *Ruth Chatterton and N. Richard Nash.*

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**E**XCEPT FOR an attractive stage setting by Motley, the exhibit enjoyed all the attributes of an unembalmed corpse, including the olfactory consequences of decomposition and the desirability of prompt interment, and lacking only mourners. This came as no surprise to anyone in the audience who had got wind of matters from Chicago, where the remains had been briefly laid out before shipping to New York and where critical groans had assumed a volume scarcely matched since the soiled zombie called *Maid In The Ozarks* persisted in walking the night despite anything Ashton Stevens, Claudia Cassidy and their colleagues could do about it.

There are some plays so bad in all departments — writing, acting, direction, etc., — that criticism is left nothing

to do but to throw up its hands. It is always possible, of course, to make funny faces at their expense, or to bring out the usual less funny allusions to the more puissant brands of cheeses, or to get nasty about the whole thing and compose obituaries in the form of Black Hand circulars. Or, yet again, if one is in unwontedly witty trim, to write pieces which, while amusing, are akin to throwing custard pies at hearses. But Mr. Nash's effort proved to be so soporific while one was in attendance upon it that all recollection of it seemed to vanish when one got out, in a hurry, of the theatre.

As much of it as I can remember seems to have been a gravelled French farce-comedy by a Hollywood movie scenario writer with Gaston and Fifi renamed Shakespeare and Anne Hathaway. Gaston Shakespeare comes back from his London triumphs to enjoy a little connubial bliss with Fifi Hathaway, finds that her fancy has turned in his absence to one Alphonse Poggs, and sets about discrediting Alphonse and achieving the amatory purpose of his visit. The setting about is orchestrated largely to quoting, for no pertinent reason, lines from his well-known plays, getting drunk, carrying on with a lewd country wench to make his wife jealous, and being cracked over the head for his (and the audience's) pains with various articles of crockery. The acting did nothing to alleviate the untoward circumstances, that of Barry Thomson as Shakespeare being of an especially azotic nature.

The first performance was marked by a particularly heavy dose of that spurious physical effervescence which actors so frequently indulge themselves in on opening nights. The stage on these occasions bursts with such animal spirits as would embarrass a well-stocked zoo. It is apparently the conviction of the players that the wholesale exuberance will induce a reciprocal wholesale response in the audience and that the latter will be stimulated beyond all bounds by it. The more usual effect is to depress and weary it from the contemplation of a stage full of actors idiotically conducting themselves like frisky colts in a barren pasture.

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## THE DANCER. JUNE 5, 1946

*A murder melodrama by Milton Lewis and Julian Funt.  
Produced by George Abbott for 5 performances in the  
Biltmore Theatre.*

### PROGRAM

HENRY WILKINS	Edgar Kent	SERGEI KRAININE	Anton Dolin
AUBREY STEWART		MADELINE KRAININE	Bethel Leslie
	Colin Keith-Johnston	CATHERINE KRAININE	Helen Flint
THE INSPECTOR	Luis Van Rooten		

**SYNOPSIS:** *The entire action takes place between 8:30 and 11 p.m., in the living-room of Aubrey Stewart's house in present-day Paris, and is continuous save for a lapse of ten minutes between Acts II and III. There are two intermissions.*

Director: Everett Sloane.

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**I**N THEATRICAL PARLANCE, a fright-wig is a headpiece, customarily worn by male Negro servants in haunted houses or burlesque comedians, which upon the latter's respective contact with a skeleton dangling in a closet or a couple of stagehands enclosed in a lion's skin, stands on end when its terrified wearer pulls a string. Very popular twenty-five or thirty years ago, it gradually lost favor with audiences and was relegated to the movies, where it has since flourished in sub-B pictures in which the moment the screen shows a dark passage-way containing a suit of armor the customers may remain contentfully assured that it will not be long before the armor will suddenly move and one Ethiopian or another will be operating the coiffure.

The Messrs. Lewis' and Funt's exhibit may be described as fright-wig melodrama. Like that contraption, its string is so visible and its modus operandi so mechanical that any hair-raising qualities the authors hoped for are confined to the obvious dramaturgical peruke and fail to extend to the spectators.

Plainly inspired by certain elements in the story of Ni-

jinsky, the dido takes place in a set of scenery described as a room in a house in Paris which, with its bluish lighting and ostentatiously bolted doors, somewhat more closely resembles a West Fifties Prohibition era speakeasy. The speakeasy is tenanted by a lunatic Russian ballet dancer named Sergei and an English art connoisseur, one Aubrey, who is his abnormal crony. Before the curtain rises, the usual prostitute who is always found murdered in such plays is again duly found near the house, and suspicion falls upon the dancer. Just what he was up to with the lady is a little hard to make out, since he is presented as a morose physical wreck who is able only at rare intervals to dredge himself up from his chair. It seems, however, that what drove him insane in the first place was his wife's avarice and that anyone who now mentions money to him upsets him considerably more than it does Miké Todd. The audience is accordingly not too much surprised when his wife comes back in the second act after a long separation, seeks to extract from him the whereabouts of his safe deposit box, and makes him so mad that he fortifies himself with a drink, leaps out of his chair like Harpo Marx, twirls an indignant pirouette, grabs her, and cracks her spine. Nor is it perceptibly more surprised when in the next act he suspects friend Aubrey of being equally interested in the box, again works up his Dutch courage with a copious snifter, leaps out of the chair like Joan McCracken, indulges in an even more outraged pirouette, grabs him, and visits the same attention upon him. While all this is going on, a French police inspector intermittently wanders in and out making knowing faces but somehow doing nothing to prevent Sergei from his mortal chiropractic. Further involved in the proceedings are Sergei's young daughter who wishes to get married but fears that she may have inherited papa's eccentricities and one of those sinister butlers who could not get a job in real life butling at Danne-mora.

The art-work is the product of two boys from Hollywood and hence understandable. It will doubtless presently find its way back to where it came from and, with its

abnormal sex element eliminated, will in due course be seen on the screens of those neighborhood parlors which are devoted largely to first-rate murders written by second-rate movie writers for third-rate films. If the boys in question had had any knowledge of drama they would have appreciated that hardly the best way to fashion any such thriller is to explain away everything at the start and then occupy the rest of the evening successively twisting the necks of actors. The result, they would have known, would be less audience chills than audience chilliness. The best thrillers seem to be those which forego wholesale killings and concern themselves with a single slaughter. Unless they are written by experts, those which involve a repertoire find the cumulative effect is much less nervous suspense than travesty. It takes a very dexterous playwright seriously to murder a number of characters and restrain his audience from thinking that it is at a botched revival of *Arsenic And Old Lace*.

The stage direction once again pursued the fantastic idea that if you pace an unstimulating thriller very slowly it will achieve an ominous quality that is otherwise nowhere in it. The acting, except for Luis Van Rooten's Gallic sleuth, which at least had an air about it, was of a first-day-rehearsal quality. Only Paul Bowles' musical accompaniment captured the glowering mood that most of those associated with the play failed to.

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## ICETIME. JUNE 20, 1946

*A skating spectacle with tunes and lyrics by Jimmy Littlefield and John Fortis. Produced by Sonja Henie and Arthur M. Wirtz for 405 performances in the Center Theatre.*

## PRINCIPALS

Joan Hyldoft, Freddie Trenkler, the Bruises, the Brandt sisters, Florence and Bob Ballard, Grace and Slagle, Jackie Reese, Fritz Deith, Jimmy Caesar, Claire Dalton, Paul Castle, Patrick Kazda, and Buck Pennington.  
Director: *Catherine Littlefield.*

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A YEAR OR SO AGO, I predicted that the public would soon become satiated with these endless ice-skating shows and as a testimonial to my clairvoyant acumen they not only proceeded to continue apace but flourished even more widely and handsomely than ever before. This only goes to prove many things: all of them, to wit, that a critic should not attribute to the public whatever surfeit he personally may feel in the matter of entertainment, since that way may lie meritorious criticism but also boomerang reviewing, and on the nose.

The present show is largely a cheap duplication of the several that preceded it, the details of which may be found in the earlier volumes of these annals. Totally lacking in imagination, it repeats everything in the antecedent exhibits in even less attractive costumes and against even less slightly scenic cut-outs. What it all amounts to is a combination of old Rockettes dance numbers and a dialogueless version of some such turkey musical as *The Girl From Nantucket*, on skates. In other words, with its monotony of rhythms, metronomic refrigeration. Rhythm thus repetitive, save apparently in the case of ice show devotees, becomes identified with the medieval torture of uninterrupted drops of water on the victim's head.

Such numbers as "Mary, Mary, Quite Contrary," with

its little Mary, Butterfly, Cat, Rabbit and Bee; "Old King Cole," with its three Fiddlers, one a dwarf; and "Candy Fairy," with its little blonde heroine asleep under a Christmas tree and with her dream coming to life, are evidently designed for the raptures of children. Children must be very backward these days if their reactions are what the producers expect.

The æsthetic enthusiasm of the adults in the opening night audience reached its highest points at the spectacle of a male skater turning a somersault and at that of a female skater whirling rapidly 'round ten times.



## TIDBITS OF 1946. JULY 8, 1946

*A vaudeville show, with sketches by Sam Locke, credited to the Youth Theatre Group. Produced by Arthur Klein in association with Henry Schumer for 8 performances in the Plymouth Theatre.*

## PRINCIPALS

Joey Faye, Muriel Gaines, Lee Trent, Josef Marais and Miranda, Carmen and Rolando, Eddy Manson, Robert Marshall, Joshua Shelley, Josephine Boyer, Jack Diamond, the Debonairs, and the Mack Triplets.

Director: *Arthur Klein.*

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THE SHOW ORIGINATED with a group of amateurs who displayed themselves in it three months earlier in the Barbizon-Plaza hotel. Taken over by the Messrs. Klein and Schumer and recharged with several professional performers, it was trustfully brought to Broadway. Just what it was doing on Broadway was a puzzle to anyone who did not stop to reflect on the numerous similar concoctions that have frequently assailed that area. Wholly devoid of merit, it offered once again, and in inferior form, such routine vaudeville numbers as the travesty ballet dancer, the harmonica player, the singing sister trio, the South American couple in samba and rhumba dances, the male "operatic" vocalist, the colored female chirper of suggestive ditties, and the colored hoofers. Also, several inoperative sketches, including the one in the psychiatrist's office, the one about the Congressman who tries to get into Heaven, and the hoary Flugle Street burlesque skit. Lee Trent, the master of ceremonies, appeared before the curtain at intervals and facetiously deplored and apologized for the doings. Had he played straight, this critique would have been superfluous.

# MAID IN THE OZARKS. JULY 15, 1946

*A play by Claire Parrish. Produced by Jules Pfeiffer for 102 performances in the Belasco Theatre.*

## PROGRAM

GRAM CALHOUN	Ercil Hart	FRANCES TOLLIVER
THAD CALHOUN	Larry Sherman	Gloria Humphreys
MOHAWK	Jack Mathiesen	CYPRESS YOUNG
BART CALVERT	John Connor	Burman Bodel
LYDIA TOLLIVER	Johnee Williams	AMY YOUNG
TEMPLE CALHOUN	Jon Dawson	Evelyn Wells
		Fargo
		DAISY BELLE
		Cecile De Lucas
		MISS BLEEKER
		Marcelle Gaudel

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Scene 1. A late spring afternoon. Scene 2. Very early the next morning. Act II. A month has passed. Late afternoon. Act III. The same day. A half-hour later.

*The scene is the kitchen of the Calhoun home in the Ozark Mountains in northwestern Arkansas.*

Director: Not specified.

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THREE YEARS AGO, a cabaret in Baltimore, Maryland, called *The Oasis*, advertised its star entertainer and show as follows:

Willie Gray, our broken-down master of ceremonies, has just completed another year in this menagerie. It's his sixteenth and that's some sort of record as so-called night club entertainers go. His worn-out gags are so terrible they make you laugh in spite of yourself and the awful show he paces is enough to drive you nuts. That's really what we're after, so everybody's happy. Slum on down tonight.

*The Oasis*, I am informed, packed them in.

The prosperous device is, of course, nothing new. It was used in the theatre, as everyone recalls, in the case of the celebrated Cherry Sisters. It was also used long before that in the case of one George Jones, known as the Count Joannes, who had to play his Romeo behind a net but who, according to Robert Grau, that entertaining historian,

"was able to reap the financial reward that many great actors of his time were denied." "Jones," continues Mr. Grau, somewhat paradoxically, "was not a bad actor, but it was impossible to hear a word he said." Yet thousands were brought by capricious advertising to crowd the theatre in which he played and had the time of their lives making noises at not only his Romeo but his Hamlet. It was further used, with equal success, in the cases of amateur nights and get-the-hook vaudeville. But it has been overlooked by producers in later years and it remained for the sponsor of this cheese-strudel to resuscitate it and to attract the numerous fowl who sadistically revel in such sports as dropping paper bags filled with water on the heads of Italian organ grinders and throwing beer bottles at female baseball teams.

The aforesaid sponsor, one Pfeiffer, advertised his show as something that the critics would declare the worst in history; observed that "We cater only to classy people — everybody in the audience must wear shoes"; stated that he had bought the costumes from the Salvation Army for one hundred and fifty dollars; allowed that any kind of actors, however bad, could play it — "I could go out and pick 'em right off the street"; boasted that its total production cost was not more than seven hundred dollars; and proclaimed that "It isn't art, but it sure is sexy, and we don't care about anything except continuing to make money."

There have been some peculiar exhibits, but few more peculiar. Purporting to be a study of Arkansas hillbilly life as seen through the eyes of a city waitress who comes to the Ozark country with her indigenous fiancé, its first act is devoted almost entirely to discourses on privies, lice, vomit, spit, body odors, bedbugs, chamber pots, and similar delicacies. Its second act takes a more elevated turn and concerns itself with the esoteric use to which Sears-Roebuck catalogues are allegedly put in the rural regions, allusions to the hinter anatomy of the ladies in the company, promiscuous loud belchings, dropping fishing worms into the table food, the dirtiness of the male characters' feet,

peeking down the bosoms of the females in the cast, rubbing semi-nude bodies against each other to the accompaniment of delighted squeals, and making jokes about the fornicatory advantages in blueberry patches. Its third act I am unable to report on, since by that time I had departed to absorb the relieving fragrance of the nearest Chinese restaurant's garbage can.

The author of the dramatic halitosis is listed as Claire Parrish, but it is to be suspected that she received considerable assistance from outside hands, all very evidently in one way or another previously associated with such enterprises as fertilizer plants, anatomical museums, sewer drainage, and French postcards. Aside from a few minutes given over to the old burlesque drunk act, retailed with some humor by a Minsky alumnus named Bodel, the result is like an idyllic promenade in a pasture luxuriant in cow deposits.

Under the circumstances, it is not strange that the play has managed a large success throughout the country. Before coming into New York, it had been in gala operation for nigh unto five years, having played for eighty-six weeks in Los Angeles, sixty-two in Chicago, twelve in San Francisco, nine in Detroit, six in St. Louis, and with excellent box-office returns elsewhere. In Newark, New Jersey, for example, it broke the house record long established by the musical comedy, *Desert Song*; in Baltimore it gathered in fifteen thousand dollars on the week; and in Milwaukee one thousand dollars over that considerable figure.

I say that it is not strange because not merely bad but exceptionally bad plays seem frequently to be to the taste of our fellow nationals. The old claptrap called *The Drunkard* lately entered the record-breaking fifteenth consecutive year of its engagement in Los Angeles; and in that same culture colony a grimy item called *She Lost It In Campeche* has enjoyed a run of nearly two years and one called *She Dood It In Dixie* is still going strong as this is being written. *Good Night Ladies*, grievous junk, ran for a full year in Chicago. Following success there, even more grievous junk called *School For Brides* lasted for more than

an entire season in New York, where even still more grievous junk called *Separate Rooms* celebrated a run of six hundred and thirteen performances. And the remarkable past success locally and elsewhere of such rubbish as *Abie's Irish Rose*, *White Cargo*, and *East Is West* is history.

This *Maid In The Ozarks* is a macédoine of many of the worst elements in some of the worst plays of the last half-century. Though compared by the management with *Tobacco Road*, it is not within hailing distance of that relatively honest and relatively decent play. What it is is simply a Chic Sale outhouse on that road, the path to which is knee-deep in mud. It was to be suggested that the Belasco Theatre, in which it was exhibited, change its name for the occasion to Gents' Room.

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## THE FRONT PAGE. SEPTEMBER 4, 1946

*A revival of the melodramatic farce-comedy by Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur. Produced by Hunt Stromberg, Jr., and Thomas Spengler for 78 performances in the Royale Theatre.*

### PROGRAM

WILSON, <i>American</i>	Roger Clark	HILDY JOHNSON, <i>Herald-Examiner</i>	
ENDICOTT, <i>Post</i>	Jack Arnold		Lew Parker
MURPHY, <i>Journal</i>		JENNIE	Blanche Lytell
	Bruce MacFarlane	MOLLIE MALLOY	Olive Deering
MCCUE, <i>City News Bureau</i>		SHERIFF HARTMAN	William Lynn
	Benny Baker	PEGGY GRANT	Pat McClarney
SCHWARTZ, <i>Daily News</i>		MRS. GRANT	Cora Witherspoon
	Ray Walston	THE MAYOR	Edward H. Robins
KRUGER, <i>Journal of Commerce</i>		MR. PINCUS	Harold Grau
	Pat Harrington	EARL WILLIAMS	George Lyons
BENSINGER, <i>Tribune</i>	Rolly Beck	WALTER BURNS	Arnold Moss
MRS. SCHLOSSER	Isabel Bonner	TONY	Leonard Yorr
"WOODENSHOES" EICHORN		CARL	Fred Bemis
	Curtis Karpe	FRANK	Vic Whitlock
DIAMOND LOUIE	Joseph De Santis		

*Policemen, Citizens, Hangmen, Blondes, etc.*

**SYNOPSIS:** *The action takes place in the press room of the Criminal Courts Building in Chicago, some years ago. Act I. 9:30 o'clock on a Friday night. Act II. Shortly afterward. Act III. A few minutes later.*

Director: Charles MacArthur.

OF THE VARIOUS newspaper plays which have been shown from time to time on the American stage, this Hecht-MacArthur exhibit proved in its original production nineteen years ago to be by far the most spiritedly entertaining. A measure of that entertainment is still to be had in its revival but, like yesterday's newspapers, these plays have a way of dating, and for reasons not too difficult to define.

However bright, fresh and audacious the treatment — and *The Front Page* in its day enjoyed just such qualities

— there is always something about the plays that is at bottom more or less anticipatable and that, while it may not interfere with interest and amusement at first sight, operates subsequently to their detriment. Whatever the general handling, one knows, for example, that the cast of characters with infrequent exception will include much the same stock figures: the hard-boiled, cursing editor, the reckless, saucy and usually alcoholized star reporter, his girl friend deeply concerned for his welfare, the faithful old shnuckel who has been around the shop since almost the paper was founded, the comical scrubwoman, the crooked political boss, the droll copy boy, and all the expected rest. One further knows that in the usual course of events the plot will turn on one of three hinges: (1) the contretemps incidental to the covering of a big news story or the uncovering of a sensational scoop; (2) the conflict brought about by the opposition of the star reporter to the newspaper's policies, which customarily results in his world-shaking resolve to leave the paper flat on its tail and to go forth with his ideals clutched to his bosom; or (3) the young man's decision to remain and to expose the paper's owner as a knave and a hypocrite who poses as a friend of the people but who is given to milking the public gas-works and eating three-dollar hamburgers *in camera*.

From Jesse Lynch Williams' *The Stolen Story*, produced in the early years of the present century, and Joseph Medill Patterson's *The Fourth Estate*, produced in the same period, through Fagan's later *The Earth* and the still later *The Front Page*, Morehouse's *Gentlemen Of The Press* and Weitzenkorn's *Five Star Final* and up to Sherwood's last year's *The Rugged Path*, the general pattern has not changed much. When these and other plays of a kind have been lively, their life has consisted wholly in the bound and caper of their dialogue. When they have proved supine, the dulness has resulted from emphasis on their plot materials. In the adroit disguising of those materials in the mask of farce and comedy has alone rested critical success.

Hecht and MacArthur were wise enough to resort to the latter method and, when their play was first displayed in

the August of 1928, it caught the town and the critics. Its rowdy humor, gaily cynical point of view and five alarm pace not only tickled the younger audiences but even more so the older, who breathed a sigh of gratitude for a newspaper play which, though its characters were in themselves familiar enough, at least handled them, as Patterson had years before, without the customary machine tools of editorial indignation, hypothetically romantic melodrama, or heroic sentimentality. What the authors, then still remote from the later infections of Hollywood, had contrived with a healthy impertinence and raffish wit was the standard newspaper play seen through the haze of several rounds of drinks. The old, dull edges of exhibits of the sort were sharpened with boozy comedy, and the old, dull plot with the kind of farcical writing which the late Charles Hoyt maneuvered in *A Milk-White Flag*, *A Texas Steer*, etc. It was great fun — in those days. But, though it is still far from unfunny, the play now misses much of the underlying satirical drive that it had then. Journalism may here and there continue to be as whimsical and goatish as it allegedly was when pictured by the boys, but nearly everybody knows it and takes it for granted and no longer thinks it particularly amusing, as the Spewacks learned lately with their *Woman Bites Dog*.

It is the fate of many such modern satirical theatrical jests to sprout faint whiskers, since what is satire in one generation becomes sometimes in the next, when its target has become a commonplace, simply obvious farce. If Hoyt's plays were to be done today, the satirical thrusts at Congressmen, military brass hats, and female politicians would, with the later increased intimacy with such figures, lose all satirical force and would take on the color of mere straight comedy, itself quite routine. And so it is largely, despite a few changes, with *The Front Page*.

The present company is in the main inferior to the original. Whenever a reviewer writes thus about a revival, it is suspected of him that he is suffering from arrested critical development. Or, to draw it on the blackboard, that when he says, for example, that E. H. Sothorn was better in a cer-



tain role than the actor currently playing it in the Lake Hopatcong summer theatre company he is probably just a dodo to whom everybody and everything in the past were superior to everybody and everything today. The criticism of him is usually ventilated either by the very young of the species whose histrionic education began with Katharine Hepburn or by the play's management whose education still awaits its inauguration. The fact obstinately remains, however, that Arnold Moss and Lew Parker are in no wise comparable to the Messrs. Perkins and Tracy who originally acted the roles, and that some of the others are equally reduced in talent.

The revival was not helped by the stage direction which, unlike George S. Kaufman's in the first production, lent to the play the aspect of a series of noisy vaudeville acts instead of fusing the elements into a rapidly gliding and crescendo stream.

## YOURS IS MY HEART. SEPTEMBER 5, 1946

*A revival of the Franz Lehár operetta originally called The Land Of Smiles, with revised book and lyrics by Ira Cobb and Karl Farkas. Produced by Arthur Spitz for 36 performances in the Shubert Theatre.*

### PROGRAM

GUY	Monroe Manning	BUTLER	Harvey Kier
LUCILLE	Helene Whitney	PRINCE SOU CHONG	
LOU	Jane Mackle		Richard Tauber
PIERRE	Harold Lazaron	HUANG WEI	Edward Groag
FERNAND	Alexander D'Arcy	TSCHANG	Arnold Spector
YVONNE	Natalye Greene	HSI FUENG	Fred Keating
FIFI	Dorothy Karrel	PRINCESS MI	Lillian Held
MARIE	Jean Heisey	MASTER OF CEREMONIES	
ARCHIBALD MASCOTTE			Albert Shoengold
	Sammy White	HIGH PRIEST	Fred Briess
CLAUDETTE VERNAY	Stella Andreva	LI TSI	Beatrice Eden

*Guests, Maids and Servants, Dancers, Mandarins, etc. Solo dancers—Trudy Goth, Henry Shwarze, Haydee Morini, Wayne Lamb, Alberto Feliciano.*

**SYNOPSIS:** Act I. *Drawing-room of Claudette Vernay's Paris apartment.* Act II. *Hall in Sou Chong's palace in Peiping, six weeks later.* Act III. *Room in Sou Chong's palace, the following day.*

**Time:** 1900.

**Director:** Theodore Bache.

SO FAR AS my research goes, the Austrian Richard Tauber will go down into history as the founder of one of the greatest industries in the vocal musical world. It was he, despite the later claims and outraged protestations of others, who first introduced into the singing of popular songs that voice crack plus a salivary flooding of the larynx, or sob gulp, which affects the sentimental sensibilities of the proletariat like a run-over dog. So successful was the artifice that it was not long thereafter that local warblers ranging from Al Jolson to the humblest little female blues singer in the humblest little saloon copied it, to the pleas-

urable psychic woe of their increasing customers. Today and in these later years the singer who doesn't in addition to the crack swallow an ounce of lugubrious mucous when he reaches the line in the chorus where his girl has left him is a phenomenon.

The Crosbys, Sinatras and Comos with their wistful ingurgitations and the Oklahoma Melbas and Iowa Gallicurcis with their heartbroken chokes stem one and all from Tauber, who almost two decades ago in Europe introduced the benign dribble into his epiglottis with the song "Yours Is My Heart Alone" in this Lehár's *The Land Of Smiles*, here again on view under the title of the ditty minus the adverb. The song was born for the purpose. A compound of rapturous longing, amorous hydromel and mental vacuity, it literally waits for the moment when its merchant will turn on the nose and throat juice and give inner indication that it is sublimely strangling him to sentimental death. And Tauber doesn't hesitate to give it the works. When the moment approaches, he gathers his full strength, resolutely sets his shoulders, closes his eyes, agitates his torso as if in the throes of a fatal delirium tremens and simultaneously with the sinus crack swallows enough spit to float the battleship *Miserere*.

The effect is electrical. Strong men who but an hour before have beaten the stuffing out of their wives liquefy with love for the little women; weak men yearn wistfully to crush the nearest female to their ardent bosoms; and just plain, ordinary, everyday men loudly beseech beer into which copiously to distil their tears. The song and Tauber, in short, are a kind of cardiac Spanish fly, guaranteed to stimulate the emotional libido of all save perhaps such as react a little more succulently to, say, Isolde's avowal to Tristan or the choral finale to the Ninth Symphony, both crackless and gulpless.

There are songs that have been largely responsible for what measure of success the shows they have been in have enjoyed, and this "Yours Is My Heart Alone" is one of them. It has in this respect served *The Land Of Smiles* in

its various incarnations as "A Hot Time In The Old Town Tonight" years ago served *Tuxedo* and as "In The Good Old Summer Time" served *The Defender*. It has bolstered an otherwise very far from spirited show as in later days "Smoke Gets In Your Eyes" bolstered *Roberta* and as "Begin The Beguine" did the same job for *Jubilee*. And it has further disproved George Santayana's firm contention that widely popular songs are short of life and soon die. It has held its own for now nigh unto twenty years and it shows no slightest signs of an early demise. In this regard it is like a Viennese "Melancholy Baby," though when it comes to relative musical quality there is small comparison. The majority of popular song composers are popular because they know little of music and because the less they know the more popular they are with the masses who know nothing at all of it. Lehár is a man of music and it is that added touch which he has brought to the composition of the song which makes its endless repetition less hard to bear.

In the singing of the ditty, Tauber has indicated that, while one swallow may not make a summer, one swallow may make a song. It is that swallow above the crack and everything else — and the everything else includes a fine if thinning lyric tenor voice — that has been chiefly responsible for bringing him fame and fortune both here and abroad. Nor has he by any means unsagaciously confined it to the song in question. Give him even something like "Ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay" and it would not much surprise anyone if he worked it in some way and not only worked it in but made his customers melt like so many warmed all-day suckers.

Our hero has for years employed the trick in musical shows and on the concert stage. It has stood him in the same circus stead that Ellen Beach Yaw's approximate double high C, which shivered the eardrums for miles around, and the Black Patti's pumpkin vibrations, which jangled the very chandeliers, stood those nightingales in their day. He has laid hold of good music and sold it to the polloi who otherwise would shrink from it by injecting the trick

into it. He has laid hold of songs without musical merit and has sold them to even a portion of the susceptible cognoscenti by the same means. And he has taken outright jonnahs that seemingly didn't stand a chance and has popularized them by a similar emulation of the Biblical tale.

As for the show in which our hero stars, aside from a pleasant though inferior Lehár score the less said the better. The book, dealing with the love of a Chinese prince for a French opera singer, amounted in the original to a burglarious intrusion upon the music and nothing that has been done to it here reduces the invasion. Some of the revisions, including the incorporation of Broadway slang and vaudeville jokes, only make matters worse. The production is further of the sort that intimates it was dug out of scenery warehouses and old costume trunks. And to make things just a little harder, someone has seen fit to open the second act with one of those extensive Chinese ceremonial numbers in which the girls shuffle coyly around the stage after the pattern of Fay Bainter in the remote days of *East Is West* the while a pair of males with bare midriffs frantically wield papier-mâché scimitars at each other.

To the prima donna role, Stella Andrevva contributes her practised if somewhat strained soprano and the collateral kind of stage comportment. The rest are mostly of the species that one encountered in operetta performances in the hinterland summer beer gardens in the closing years of the last century. Sammy White, for example, as the comedy impresario rests his humor in retailing the plot of the opera *Tosca* to the accompaniment of ferocious scowls and lunges with an imaginary dagger, to say nothing, for good measure, of appearing later on in a whimsical bicycling costume. Alexander D'Arcy, a recruited screen beauty who would be good-looking if he could act, interprets the part of the French lover by industriously fixing his Hollywood profile in a set position and occasionally vouchsafing a roguish side-glance to the ladies in the audience. And Lillian Held, as the Chinese soubrette, additionally disturbs the picture with a plump German accent and a pit-a-pat walk that considerably less suggests the supposed gait of an

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Oriental maiden than that of a Fräulein on her way to an orthopedic surgeon.

Judging from their looks, though not from their vocal ability, the ladies of the ensemble must have been picked by Alec Templeton.

## A FLAG IS BORN. SEPTEMBER 5, 1946

*A charity exhibit by Ben Hecht, with a musical accompaniment by Kurt Weill. Produced by the American League For A Free Palestine for 120 performances in, initially, the Alvin Theatre.*

### PROGRAM

SPEAKER	Quentin Reynolds	RUSSIAN STATESMAN	
TEVYA	Paul Muni		Yasha Rosenthal
ZELDA	Celia Adler	1ST ENGLISH STATESMAN	
DAVID	Marlon Brando		Tom Emlyn Williams
THE SINGER	Mario Berini	2ND ENGLISH STATESMAN	
SAUL	George David Baxter		Jefferson Coates
OLD ONE	Morris Samuylow	FRENCH STATESMAN	
MIDDLE-AGED ONE	David Manning		Frederick Rudin
YOUNG ONE	John Baragrey	1ST SOLDIER	Steve Hill
DAVID THE KING	William Allyn	2ND SOLDIER	Jonathan Harris
SOLOMON	Gregory Morton	3RD SOLDIER	Harold Gary
AMERICAN STATESMAN			
	Jonathan Harris		
Director: Luther Adler.			

IT IS THE frequent eccentricity of producers of charity shows to invite the professional critics and yet hopefully to expect them, in view of the purpose of the occasions, to suspend any unfavorable opinions they may possibly have of them. There are many things I can understand, but this particular one routs me. Just why a critic should be supposed to convert himself into an amiable hypocrite and liar simply because the money from an exhibit is to go to some cause or other instead of into the customary pockets is a problem in drama criticism that awaits solution by a mightier cranium than mine. If the producers ask a critic to review the shows, they should expect the truth. If they don't want it, they should keep their tickets.

Let us say, for example, that the poor skating show, *Ice-time*, had been put on for the benefit of Eskimo orphans. Would the circumstance alter one's honest critical opinion

that it was poor? Because the ridiculously inept *Winged Victory* was produced for the Army Air Forces' benefit, did that make it any better than it was? A tender heart is all right in its place and may well be appropriate to holy wedlock and the care of dogs but its place, unless I misunderstand the profession, is hardly in criticism.

There are times, of course, when one of the shows in question is good stuff and so offers criticism no embarrassment. *This Is The Army*, for example, which was staged for the benefit of Army relief, was an excellent thing of its kind and would have deserved all the critical praise it got even had it been staged for the sole benefit of Irving Berlin. But for one such exceptional show there are at least four or five that would be mercilessly tarred and feathered if produced to the usual ends yet which here and there are graciously let off with kind words simply on the ground that destitute Afghanistan war widows or arteriosclerotic Chinese acrobats are to get the money instead of Lee Shubert. I am not, surely, reflecting on the worthy purpose of many of these shows. Far from it. My point is rather that a worthy purpose does not necessarily indicate a worthy show. And the worthiness of a show remains or should remain the single consideration of any critic whose possible softness of heart has not extended to a softening of the brain.

These reflections are induced by this *A Flag Is Born*, written by Ben Hecht, that busy bee, and put on by the American League For A Free Palestine with the purpose of accumulating funds for the transportation of homeless European Jews to their alleged rightful home in the Holy Land, at the moment denied them by the British. That the intent and aim of the production command all critical respect no one, except possibly the lambasted British, will for a moment disbelieve. But that the production itself commands any such thing can be believed in turn only by the kind of critic who feels that he must tread very cautiously in such matters lest he offend a people and who offends them doubly by inditing praise of a show that they recognize as unmerited and, worse still, condescending.



The idea evidently held by such critics is that Jews are so overly sensitive and uninformed in matters theatrical that they regard as a personal insult a bad notice of any play or show which deals benevolently with them and which they themselves would doubtless walk out on before it was half over. It is thus that the history of modern local theatrical reviewing is replete with guarded qualifications of various such productions which, while now and then timidly allowed to be somewhat less than perfect, have nonetheless been effusively marmaladed for their "sincerity," "nobility of intent," "high purpose," and other such attributes, all to be found in some wholly different sort of play like, for instance, *Foxhole In The Parlor*, which the selfsame critics have not hesitated to roast to a frazzle.

It is an encouraging sign, however, that a number of today's newspapers and their reviewers wisely feel that they must no longer arbitrarily take an overcautious critical attitude toward these affairs and, like the *New York Times* and *Herald Tribune*, do not hesitate to comment forthrightly on one like this, whatever its praiseworthy charitable design. Writes Mr. Atkinson in the former, "The mixed values of Mr. Hecht's script leave this reviewer ungratefully reluctant. The cause of the Jews . . . deserves a finer script than Mr. Hecht has delivered." He then proceeds to flay its "scribbling at random for most of the evening," such pageants "which at best are untalented theatre," its "pious charge of doubtful accuracy," and its "prose poems in an intolerable tuppence-colored style." And Mr. Barnes in the latter pursues the onset: "Its value as an instrument to open the doors of Palestine to Jewish refugees is not the business of this reviewer. As a show it is distinctly dubious. . . . The production as a whole is slipshod and rather wearisome. Hecht has mounted a rocket gun to carry his message where a single clean shot might have proved more effective. . . . His militant shouting drowns out fragments of stern and moving theatre."

It is inconceivable that even such Jewish critics as Georg Brandes, Max Beerbohm and Alfred Kerr, all fine and honorable men, would ever have permitted or would permit

their personal prejudices to color their criticisms in a case like this. While appreciating the merit of the show's purpose — even Beerbohm, an Englishman, could not fail to be honest in that regard — they would freely have to admit the tedium of its pageantry, the overemphasis of its documentary propaganda, and the lack of dramaturgical wisdom in so insistently and loudly hitting a single note that the ear, which should be persuaded, is deafened to its appeal.

In a display that runs for one hour and three-quarters without an intermission, Hecht — to the accompaniment of a Kurt Weill score which is often appropriate if sometimes consonantly monotonous — seeks to tell in terms of strident political propaganda much the same basic story which Franz Werfel told in the ill-fated *The Eternal Road* and which many writers have told before him, to wit, the story of the Wandering Jew. As in Werfel, he presents a people presently persecuted, disfranchised, and threatened with extinction and in their terror and bewilderment encouraged and given strength by the reassurances of the Old Testament, acted out on fancy platforms high above the stage. The Werfel play, as everyone recalls, was far from inspiring, and was overlong and theatrically exhausting. Hecht's is not actually so long, but it seems so, and for reasons that are simple.

In the first place, he introduces a narrator who gratuitously lectures at great length to the audience on what it is subsequently going to see and hear, and the lecturing, to make matters thicker, is much of it couched in amethyst velour phrases. In the second place, the pitch and tone of the pageant itself are for the most part so low and slow by theoretical way of lending it gravity that the audience mood instead of being exalted is gradually depressed into somnolence. In the third place, the periodic bursts of challenge and exhortation are so over-violent and noisy that they not only miss the effect hoped for but irritate the patience much as does a protracted street pavement drilling and blasting operation, however valuable its ultimate purpose. In the fourth place, an able dramatist knows better

than outright to dynamite a theme in his audience's face; he appreciates that a time-fuse is the more valuable way to go about the business. And, in the fifth place and finally, indignation is not to be imparted to an audience by too much of it on a stage. Mr. Hecht still has to learn the efficiency of the dramatic technique of propaganda by omission.

The acting of the exhibit by Paul Muni and most of his colleagues was of the droning liturgical species, now and then punctuated with exclamatory auctioneering, which is customarily associated with such spectacles.

## GYPSY LADY. SEPTEMBER 17, 1946

*A "period piece" with music by Victor Herbert, book by Henry Myers, and lyrics by Robert Wright and George Forrest. Produced by Edwin Lester for 79 performances in the Century Theatre.*

### PROGRAM

BARON PETTIBOIS		BORIS	Melville Cooper
	<i>Clarence Derwent</i>	ROSZIKA	Patricia Sims
YVONNE	<i>Kaye Connor</i>	SANDOR	George Britton
FRESCO	<i>Jack Goode</i>	ANDRE, MARQUIS OF RONCEVALLE	Gilbert Russell
MUSETTA	<i>Helena Bliss</i>	STEPHAN, DUKE OF RONCEVALLE	Joseph Macaulay
SERGEANT OF GENDARMES	<i>Edmund Dorsay</i>	THE UNDECIDED MADEMOISELLE	Suzette Meredith
THE GREAT ALVARADO	<i>John Tyers</i>	M. GUILBERT ARMAND	Bert Hillner
VALERIE, MARQUISE OF RONCE-		MAJORDOMO	Harvey Shahan
VALLE	<i>Doreen Wilson</i>		
IMRI	<i>Val Valentinoff</i>		
RUDOLFO	<i>William Bauer</i>		

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Scene 1. Baron Pettibois' Academy of Theatre Arts. An afternoon early in summer. Scene 2. The Gypsy camp. At sunset the same day. Scene 3. The Baron's garden. The next day. Act II. Scene 1. A suite in a Paris hotel. A few weeks later. Scene 2. Roof of the hotel overlooking Montmartre. The same evening. Scene 3. Terrace of the Château de Roncevalle. A fortnight later. Scene 4. Cupid's cupola. Later that night. Scene 5. The road. Dawn.

Time and Place: France, about 1900.

Directors: Robert Wright and George Forrest.

BACK IN THE DAYS when the world was younger and more salubrious and when Delmonico's at Fifth Avenue and Forty-fourth Street had not yet prosaically been supplanted by a railroad agency, Victor Herbert and I sat one gentle Spring evening over the wine and discoursed not only on it but on its two well-known and equally warming appendixes. A large and confiding soul, he brought himself finally to the third item in the evening's bill of particulars.

"When it comes to song," said the old boy, "success be-

gins with a hum. A song that can be sung by people right after they have heard it for the first time is often doomed to failure. But if it eludes them for the time being and they can only vaguely hum it, one may be fairly sure that it is on the road to popularity. I should therefore rather compose one such hummer than any six songs that are more quickly and fully capturable."

It is the difference between the tunes of a talented musician and of a tin piano artificer that, while those of the former are frequently somewhat difficult of nabbing, those of the latter present no such problem. Politely refraining from naming names in the second catalogue, the tunes written by the parties for the Broadway shows are mostly of such an obviously derivative or elementary order that one can yodel them in their entirety after a first hearing, sometimes, indeed, after hearing only the first measure or two. Anyone gifted in even a one-finger playing of the piano may, given their opening bars, go on and play any number of them pretty accurately. But the songs of men like Herbert have a freshness, a compositional ingenuity, and an harmonic sleight that take a while to capture and, when captured, linger affectionately not only on the lips but in the memory.

It has been complained of Herbert that there is sometimes a slight excess of syrup in his songs. The criticism is partly true. But it is true in such part mainly in the case of his love songs and is therefore not to be considered too nefarious. Love, I am informed by those of experience in the matter, induces in its victims a mood of a piece with uncrystallizable fluid separated from crystallized sugar in the refining process, and it is thus appropriate that songs of love recognize the fact. It is the worst kind of critical cynicism which forbids such purely romantic melodies the "moonbeams and starbeams and stories" of Swinburne and that would have in their stead the sour flavors of something like "Sioux City Sue." Herbert was an Irishman trained and educated in Germany and when you have an Irishman trained and educated in Germany you are not likely to get from him love songs anything like "The Girl With The

Three Blue Eyes." What you may expect is rather a good sentimental mixture of Cathleen ni Houlihan and Lorelei, and that is what you get from Victor. His songs are Rhine wine with sprigs of shamrock: mellow, melting, unashamed to weep a little, and with the shamrock handsomely bestowed upon the barmaid's coiffure.

In this *Gypsy Lady*, which is a combination and rearrangement of parts of the scores of *The Fortune Teller*, *The Serenade*, *The Idol's Eye*, *The Ameer*, and *The Singing Girl*, the humming-bird of another generation has been brought back to us and, as in the case of *The Red Mill*, our ears are again to be congratulated. The songs are as charming as ever; Helena Bliss and a competent company do not fail them; and while the new, facetious book supplied the occasion by Henry Myers is surely no pearl without price, it at least permits us for all its heavy winks pleasantly to recall a music show era, whatever its admitted lapses, in which heroines sang of fragrant romance instead, as nowadays, about doin' things that come natchu'llly or shooting a male in the tail.

"The concept behind the book," the management has confided to the reviewers, "was that it was to be a modern, light, tongue-in-the-cheek treatment of the stock period operetta story." The management's apparent notion that the books of the period in question were regularly of an unrelievedly overstuffed romantic nature and without any such tongue-in-the-cheek treatment calls for some education. For just one example, the book of *The Fortune Teller*, the score of which, as noted, figures in this synthetic *Gypsy Lady*, ribbed itself with a comedian who moved through it looking for a good joke around which to build just such a book.

Mr. Lester, the producer, has further observed, "I had to have a completely new book because, although Herbert wrote around fifty shows, not one of them has a good book." This professor once again has to call upon himself to instruct Mr. Lester. The books of *Babes In Toyland*, *Cyrano de Bergerac*, *It Happened In Nordland*, *Mlle. Modiste*, and *Wonderland* (derived from the Grimms' fairy

tales) were far from contemptible. And there were others like *Miss Dolly Dollars*, *Eileen*, *et al.*, that were quite passable.

All of which brings us to the general question of these books of another day.

Reviewing the musical comedies at the Gaiety all of thirty-seven years ago, the matchless Mr. Beerbohm had this to say:

One reason why the place is irresistible is that nowhere else do we feel that we are so far away, and so harmlessly and elegantly far away, from the realities of life. We are translated into a sphere where the dwellers have nothing whatever to think about, and would be incapable of thought if there were need for it. All the people (except the ladies of the chorus, whose languor is part of the fun) are in the highest spirits, with no chance of a reaction. . . . Every one wants every one else to have a good time, and tries to make everything easy and simple all around. This good time, as I need hardly say, is of a wholly sexual order. And yet every one, from the highest to the lowest, is thoroughly 'good.' The most attractive of the men do no harm to the ladies who love them at first sight. Not less instantaneous than theirs are the conquests made by the most unattractive men. A homuncule, made up to look as absurd as possible, has only to come by and wink at the bevy of lovely ladies to whom he is a perfect stranger, when behold! their arms are about his neck, their eyes devour him, they languish and coo over him. . . .

The master's words are as apt now as they were when he wrote them. And in them — which is the apology for quoting them at length — is to be found the best answer to those present critics who are forever deploring the books of musical comedies and urging upon them a greater measure of sense and wisdom. If anything would ruin musical comedy it would be such sensible books. Only a donkey would seek and demand intelligence on such occasions. Sense and intelligence are desiderata of drama. Musical comedy is best when it abjures them and substitutes for them absurd fancy and all the wonderful illogic of a won-

derful world that never was. The best show of the kind, in brief, is that one in which the people, like Topsy, were not born but just grew, and whose growth, furthermore, is stunted by mindlessness, giddiness, and irresponsibility.

That no one thinks in musical comedy and would be incapable of thought if there were need for it, as Beerbohm observed, is its prime asset. There can be no romance where even one party to it brings his brain cells into action, and the best musical comedy authors wisely appreciate the fact. Romance is a tacit agreement by both parties not for a moment to analyze and think away their feelings. Even a touch of wit is perilous. If you will forgive me for quoting from myself — "I like to quote from myself," says Bernard Shaw; "it adds spice to the conversation" — I repeat a few lines from a little book published some thirty years ago:

It was moonlight in the courtyard where languished among the flowers a lover and his mistress. The lover, presently, and for the first time since he had known his fair lady, felt Wit flying close to his lips. The little god of Love who had dwelt with the lovers in the courtyard since first they had come there, sensing the flutter of the intruder's wings, took to his heels and slid between the bars of the great bronze gate into a neighboring garden.

The critical insistence upon books that lean to some intelligence and realism has done much to debilitate musical comedy. Posturing a hostility to sentiment, the young critics currently in extensive practise have sought through manly sneers to exorcise it from the medium and to replace it with elements generally described as hard-boiled. One of their latest complaints is against even one of the two finest of American musical comedies, *Show Boat*. It seems, as I observed at the time, that the love story of the wistful Magnolia and the handsome Ravenal is too full of the moonlight of the heart for them. What, I inquired, do they desire in shows whose very essence is necessarily sentimental romance? The story of a garbage collector and a female chiropodist? Such critics do not want musical comedy, but



bastard drama embroidered with tunes. They do not want a beautiful stage world aglow with starlight and impossible dreams but one that theatrically resembles the yak, with the head of an ox, the tail of a horse, and the squeal of a pig. They want, in short, not a holiday from prosaicism but a return to it, the dolts.

There is, of course, no accounting for tastes, as the man licking his chops over a frankfurter cynically observed of one eating a *châteaubriand papillote*. But, speaking for myself, when I go to a musical comedy I go in the hope of seeing something that will remove me from the gray world about me and not remind me of it with the spectacle of a black marketeer kicking a prostitute in the promontory the while her frowzy mother stands at the footlights and howls a song called "My Daughter Maybe Ain't No Lady, But, Oh Boy, She Brings Home The Dough." Somehow, eccentric as I am, I seem to prefer things like *The Merry Widow*, or *The Arcadians*, or *Music In The Air*.

It is not that I am sentimental. Very far from it. But I nevertheless will give you all the songs like "You Can't Get A Man With A Gun," in *Annie Get Your Gun*, with its allusions to the male behind for one like "Egern On The Tegernsee" from the above mentioned *Music In The Air*, and all those like "Nuts," with their back-fence lyrics, in all the *Duchesses Misbehave* for even half a one like *Show Boat's* "Make Believe" or this *Gypsy Lady's* "Spring-tide." Not that I don't relish lyric comedy; I am a mark for it, provided only it has the consideration to amuse me. But somehow I don't seem to find much amusement in vulgarity for vulgarity's sake. Nor is it, to continue the confidential autobiography, that I shrink, like a dollar shirt, from vulgarity. Honest vulgarity is also all right with me, but it has to be honest and not forcedly hot-house grown for huckster purposes. The simple vulgarity of some such song as "Dar's No Coon Warm Enough For Me" or "Shake That Thing" is down my alley. But the manufactured sort in such musical comedy numbers as "Katie Did In Madrid" and the like leaves me cold.

The best musical comedies and even comic operas and

operettas, to return to our theme, are those in which sense is reduced to a minimum, the worst those which aim at some rationality. It is significant that, when *Arms And The Man* was converted into *The Chocolate Soldier*, the elimination of most of Shaw's most pointed observations and speeches helped it enormously. Imagine, if you can, a series of musical exhibits similarly derived from Shaw's plays in which the Shavian mind was permitted to exercise itself free from interference. Not even half a dozen Oscar Strauses operating on each simultaneously could triumph over them, save possibly in the case of music lovers with the virtuosity to fix their attention so completely on the music that they would not hear the words.

The great charm of *Die Fledermaus*, aside from the Johann Strauss music, lies in the complete nonsensicality of its story, which invites the auditor to such a suspension of common sense that he sees nothing unusual in what is perhaps the most supremely idiotic ball scene plot ever shown on the stage. The delight of some such musical comedy as the current *Carousel*, apart from Rodgers' tunes, lies equally in a hero and heroine so devoid of the rudiments of intelligence and in subsidiary characters so ignorant that nothing interferes in the least with their persuasive communication of otherwise unbelievable emotions. The device of daftly transplanting Molnár's original characters from Hungary to Cape Cod, Massachusetts, further helps matters considerably. Since you thus do not believe anything to start with, whatever happens becomes paradoxically the more acceptable. If so many as even one of the characters stopped sighing over love or revelling in clam-bakes for so long as a minute and offered evidence of a mentality developed to the point where he or she didn't believe that every one of June's thirty days had been gloriously sunny since the world began — if so many as even one did any such thing, the show would miss a lot of its present pleasure and would probably make eight thousand dollars a week less, or maybe ten.

Topical and satirical musical shows like the meritorious *Of Thee I Sing* beside the argument, it accordingly holds

that the most a good musical comedy may permissibly do is to hint occasionally at sense and then sensibly forget it. The bad one is most often found to be that one which tells or tries to tell its story with a reasonable approach to life and actuality. Life and actuality, unfortunately, are not veined with music, and music can only make their stage approximation that much more ridiculous.

The trouble, in short, is not, as the critics maintain, so much that musical comedy books are silly but rather that too frequently they are not silly enough. What we need in musical comedy is less the contemporary attempt to present us with fairly recognizable and slightly foolish characters than the wholly unrecognizable and completely foolish ones as in the gala old musical comedies and operettas, the sort that Beerbohm wrote about and that his father before him would doubtless also have written about if he had enjoyed his son's profession. What we need and crave are shows as handsomely preposterous as *Wang* and *Panjandrum* and the kind that George Edwardes used to put on at Max's Gaiety, not the current solemn species in which a man and woman who violently love each other decline to go to bed together and keep the audience out of its for three-quarters of an hour longer than is either desirable or necessary. What we want, despite the academic critics, is a return of the old-time enchanting absurdity, the old-time refusal to reflect life and reality in any degree, the old-time razzle and dazzle of the unreal and the incredible.

Close your eyes and think back and have yourself a time. Think back to the happy, innocent musical comedy days of *The Isle Of Champagne* where all was Pol Roger instead of water and where Tom Seabrooke found half a dozen beautiful girls under every palm tree, all of them crazy about him. Or of *El Capitan* with Sousa's brass band in tons of gold braid gladdening the lovers' honeymoon no end by descending upon their love nest and booming out military marches before breakfast. Or *The Monks Of Malabar* with Francis Wilson doomed to be executed at the stroke of twelve for the heinous crime of pinching the

cheek of Hallen Mostyn's girl, Madge Lessing, itchily waiting for the clock to strike, slowly counting off the strikes, and relieved to hear that they amounted to thirteen. Or *The Belle Of New York* with the poor little Salvation Army lassie becoming overnight the social arbiter of the then tony and exclusive Narragansett. Or *The Sunshine Girl* at Max's beloved Gaiety in which the parting of the lovers at the end of the second act was brought about by the horrible discovery by the hero that the beautiful heroine's millionaire father had odiously made his money out of soap.

And in the comic operas and operettas, permit yourself a wistful sigh over the nepenthe of a *The Queen's Lace Handkerchief* with the poet Cervantes becoming a brigand dressed as a waiter and persuading the King of Portugal, while serving His Highness an empty ale mug and while His Highness gurgled his satisfaction over the non-existent beverage, that the Queen was innocent of any lascivious intentions toward him and loved the royal pot-hoister despite appearances. Or *The Fencing Master* (recall Marie Tempest, then so pert and frou-frou) with Marie brought up as a boy (and with that figure!) and completely deceiving the sporty Fortunio, rightful heir to the throne of Milan, the damn fool, as to her sex. Or *Martha*, with Lady Harriet, wearying of high life at the court of Queen Anne, disguising herself as a servant girl in search of a job and falling in love with a country bumpkin who turns out to be the only son of the Earl of Derby. Or *Madeleine* in which a slightly tired bachelor who has attained the age of one hundred years can lose twenty-five of them if one girl kisses him, another twenty-five if a second does, still another twenty-five if, without solicitation, a third does and, presumably, though the plot cruelly seemed to stop there, yet another ten, reducing his age to fifteen, if a fourth cutie were to deign to tickle his nose.

What nowadays do we most often get in place of such opium? In an *Are You With It?* an insurance actuary who makes a mistake in book-keeping and in shame joins a sandlot carnival the romantic aspect of which is realisti-

cally registered by a fat colored woman, a brash stripper, and a couple of dwarfs, all given to the screeching of juke-box tunes. In a *Billion Dollar Baby* a gold-digger encouraged by her grafting mother to inflame the libido of a concupiscent old mug and get what money she can out of him. In a *The Duchess Misbehaves* a fashionable married female who poses in the nude for a department store janitor and who, when the painting is finished, spends the rest of the evening singing smutty songs the while she lifts her skirts above her navel. In a *Bloomer Girl* a boiler-house argument for women's rights. In a *Sadie Thompson* a prostitute who so overstimulates the lust of a quondam minister of the gospel that in remorse he commits suicide. In a *A Lady Says Yes* a hussy who goes on the miscellaneous make, and makes it. In a *Park Avenue* the spectacle of wholesale adultery. And so on.

Me, I'll take the old sentimental shows, however imbecile and lacking in sense.

## HIDDEN HORIZONS. SEPTEMBER 19, 1946

*A mystery play by Agatha Christie. Produced by the Messrs. Shubert in association with Albert de Courville for 12 performances in the Plymouth Theatre.*

### PROGRAM

1ST BEADSELLER	Monty Banks, Jr.	SIMON MOSTYN	Blair Davies
2ND BEADSELLER	David Andrews	KAY MOSTYN	Barbara Joyce
STEWARD	Charles Alexander	ARCHDEACON PENNYFEATHER	
MISS FFOLIOT-FFOULKES			Halliwell Hobbes
	Eva Leonard-Boyne	JACQUELINE DE SEVERAC	
CHRISTINA GRANT	Joy Ann Page		Diana Barrymore
SMITH	David Manners	McNAUGHT	Winston Ross
LOUISE	Edith Kingdon	TWO EGYPTIAN	{ Leland Hamilton Damian Nimer
DR. BESSNER	Peter Von Zerneck	POLICEMEN	

**SYNOPSIS:** *The scene is laid throughout in the observation salon of the paddle steamer Lotus on the Nile between Shellal and Wadi Halfa. Act I. At Shellal. Late afternoon. Act II. Scene 1. Evening. Three days later by the Temple Abu Simbel. Scene 2. Five minutes later. Act III. The following morning.*

Director: *Albert De Courville.*

**I**T IS THE CUSTOM of producers of mystery plays either to insert a box into the program requesting the reviewers to refrain from divulging the solution or otherwise to let it be known that any such betrayal would be grossly distasteful to them. "The pleasure of future audiences will be impaired," they confidently allow, "if they know the dénouement."

Not long ago in London one such producer took the extra precaution (in behalf of future audiences that somehow failed to show up) of writing to James Agate, critic of the *Sunday Times*, that he hoped Agate would see fit not to tell his readers about the third act which contained the explanation of the mystery. After seeing the play, Agate observed in his review that not only would he gladly oblige the producer but that he would further oblige ev-

everybody else by not telling about the first and second acts either. After attending this mystery by Miss Christie, derived from her novel, *Death On The Nile*, I feel much the way Agate did. Not only am I happy to keep secret the play's secret; I am even happier to keep the whole play secret.

If, however, there are readers who foolishly rebel at such generosity and insist upon being tormented in the interest of facts, I shall so far forget my own happiness as to impart some of the unnecessary details to them.

The action of the play takes place in the observation salon of a paddle steamer on the Nile. The salon, as scene designer Charles Elson has fashioned it, closely resembles the foyer of Madame Helena Rubinstein's beauty parlor, and the Nile, seen through the windows, the Bay of Naples. The passengers include, among others, a honeymooning couple, the vengeful young woman whom the bridegroom has jilted, a clergyman, a doctor, a young Earl incognito, and the bride's French maid. Presently, the bridegroom is shot but only wounded by the vengeful female, his wife is murdered in her cabin, and the maid, who has seen the killer, is shot to death just as she is about to reveal his identity. After two hours of very bad playwrighting and worse dialogue, it is explained — let the producers go chase themselves — that the bridegroom is a scoundrel who in cahoots with his supposedly jilted love has murdered his wife to get her substantial monies, along with the French maid who might have betrayed him.

The majority of the actors comported themselves like corpses a.w.o.l.; the direction was of the kind that caused them to stand up when normally they would have remained seated and arbitrarily to run about the stage apparently looking for the play that wasn't there, to say nothing of permitting the wearing of black dinner clothes in the tropics; and the paddle steamer was conveniently dramatized as either about to sail, about to land, or held at port in order to economize on the electrical lighting equipment necessary to indicate through moving clouds and plowed waters that it was in motion.

The Messrs. Cerf and Cartmell, those wholesale anthologists, just before the presentation of the exhibit came out with another called *Famous Plays Of Crime And Detection*, including such specimens as *Sherlock Holmes*, *The Bat*, *Within The Law*, *On Trial*, etc. In a foreword, they deplored the circumstance that "in the past three years, with the public . . . literally begging for cops-and-robbers, body-in-the-closet entertainment, all that the legitimate theatre has been able to whip up was one single exhibit, *Ten Little Indians*, so feeble in comparison with the stalwarts in this collection that we never even considered it for inclusion." Though they were correct in their opinion of *Ten Little Indians*, their statistics were in error. Far from whipping up, as they expressed it, this one single exhibit, the local theatre in the three-year period in point whipped up all of twenty-one others and the road theatre at least five more. While the gentlemen were apparently unaware of the copious number they may be reassured that, like *Ten Little Indians*, none, however, was any good.

Just why later day playwrights with negligible exception have been unable to confect satisfactory thrillers and mystery plays is itself a far more interesting mystery than any they have thought up. Since the success of a mystery story or play does not, as literature and the drama in their other phases most often do, call for the reader or spectator to identify himself in any degree with any one of the characters, except possibly in a juvenile way with the detective, and is hence easy on the resources of even the most backward numskull, the ordinarily difficult character problem does not enter into the picture. And since literary grace, wit, poetry, profound understanding, philosophy, and all other such qualities are also unnecessary, the rest should be equally simple. Yet disregarding critical merit and even commercially only two of the twenty-seven plays produced in the three years specified have made a dollar at the box-office.

This one, the twenty-eighth, collapsed after only a dozen performances.



# THE BEES AND THE FLOWERS

SEPTEMBER 26, 1946

*A comedy by Frederick Kohner and Albert Mannheimer.  
Produced by Mort Singer, Jr., for 28 performances in the  
Cort Theatre.*

## PROGRAM

LOUISE MORGAN	<i>Barbara Robbins</i>	TACK COOPER	<i>Russell Hardie</i>
NANCY	<i>Jean Frey</i>	DIPPY MARSHALL	<i>Sylvia Lane</i>
ALIX MORGAN	<i>Sybil Stocking</i>	DRAYMAN	<i>Maurice Brenner</i>
TESS MORGAN	<i>Rosemary Rice</i>	TOM	<i>Leonard Bell</i>
ILKA MORGAN	<i>Joyce Van Patten</i>	JERRY	<i>Peggy Romano</i>
WINSTON ATCHISON	<i>Michael Dreyfus</i>		

**SYNOPSIS:** *The entire action takes place on the terrace of the Morgan apartment, New York City. Time: The present. Act I. Scene 1. A late Friday afternoon in June. Scene 2. Same day, after dinner. Scene 3. Same day. Half an hour later. Act II. Scene 1. Saturday. About 9:30 a.m. Scene 2. That night. About midnight. Scene 3. Sunday. About 8 a.m.*

Director: *Albert Mannheimer.*

THE PLAY DEALS with the children of a divorcée who has concealed her second marriage from them and who introduces her new husband into their household as a casual friend, with the aghast puzzlement of the youngsters over the subsequent actions of the couple. When you are apprised that the authors are a pair of Hollywood motion picture scenario writers on brief leave from their profession, any further criticism should be unnecessary. You should know, for example, that being such writers on leave they would batten on the opportunity freely to let go with adolescent sex talk, denied them in Hollywood where children are to be shown on the screen only as pig-tailed innocents, cosmeticed Tom Sawyers, or incipient Flagstads. You should know, for further example, that the general writing would be of the kind favored by Roxy audiences, that the dramaturgy would be of the elementary

and jerky sort favored by the camera, that the comedy would consist in allusions to Van Johnson, Bing Crosby and Spencer Tracy and in such lines as "He's part Indian" — "Well, for that matter, I'm part Irish," that there would be at least one reference to *Forever Amber*, and, finally, that no chance to be elaborately suggestive would be overlooked. The circumstance that the play was sold to the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer outfit for fifty thousand dollars before production only goes to indicate the peculiar manner in which the moving picture companies operate, since when the sex dialogue and other forbidden elements are compulsorily eliminated for screen purposes hardly anything will remain of the purchased article.

The acting, save for an unusually skilful little ten-year-old, Sybil Stocking, along with the direction, was of the fly-by-night species.

Little provides more tedious reading than most of what may be called the If treatises, which concern themselves with the state of affairs that would befall in one direction or another in the event that something which might conceivably happen actually did happen, and whose published number has been legion. There may, however, in connection with this play be some constructive irony in contemplating what might occur to the stage if the code governing the making of the moving pictures and supported by the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America were to have its counterpart in the theatre.

The possibility is not, after all, so absurdly extreme as it sounds. In certain instances, municipal or other censorship has already sought to impose upon the stage several of the very restrictions suffered by the screen. The New York closing of three such plays of sexual perversion, banned in their entirety by the movie code, as *The Captive*, *Pleasure Man*, and *Trio*, has been a potential straw in the wind. So has been the moral suppression in other communities of various plays like *The Iceman Cometh*, *Strange Interlude*, and *Tobacco Road*, along with the attempted suppression or forced revision of such as *Idiot's Delight*, *Desire Under The Elms*, *A Moon For The Misbeggotten*, et al. But the

whole code picture clearly emphasizes the gulf between the screen and the stage and indicates what the position of the theatre might be like under some constituted dictatorship such as that of Will Hays, Joseph Breen, or Eric Johnston.

Specifies the code: "Motion pictures made in the United States are, with a few exceptions, produced in accordance with the provisions of a Production Code. A majority of the foreign pictures, exhibited in theatres here, likewise conform to these self-imposed industry rules and regulations. In Hollywood, there is a department of the Association, with an office also in New York, known as the Production Code Administration which was organized by the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America, Inc., and which is authorized and maintained by the producing companies using it. The group which forms this Administration has been empowered . . . to make certain that the articles of the Production Code are uniformly and impartially interpreted and applied. All the major producing and distributing companies in the United States, and ninety-nine per cent of the others, work with and through the Production Code Administration. Very few of the producers of English-dialogue motion pictures now being publicly exhibited in theatres in the United States fail to make use of the facilities of the Code Administration."

Irrespective of the quality or lack of quality of the plays mentioned and simply as a study in the two freedoms, here, roughly, is what the general situation of the stage would be if a similar code were in strict application. (The Hollywood code regulations and specifications are indicated in *italics*.)

1. *No picture shall be produced which will lower the moral standards of those who see it. Hence the sympathy of the audience shall never be thrown to the side of crime, wrongdoing, evil, or sin.*

A few examples of the plays which, under the ruling, could not without alterations be produced in the theatre: *Camille*, *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*, *The Notorious Mrs.*

*Ebbsmith, Magda, Mrs. Dane's Defence, Rose Bernd, Honor, Lady Windermere's Fan, Monna Vanna, Maternity, The Iceman Cometh, etc.*, in short, the plays of Dumas, Pinero, Sudermann, Jones, Hauptmann, Wilde, Maeterlinck, Brieux, O'Neill, *et al.*, along with such as *Raffles, The Last Of Mrs. Cheyney, Jim the Penman, Arsène Lupin, Get-Rich-Quick Wallingford, etc.*

2. *Correct standards of life, subject only to the requirements of drama and entertainment, shall be presented.*

This would eliminate many such plays as Gorki's *Night Refuge*, Wedekind's *Earth Spirit* and *Pandora's Box*, Strindberg's *Countess Julie*, Houghton's *Hindle Wakes*, Guitry's *Sleeping Partners* among a dozen other plays, together with at least one-third of the comedy and farce produce of France, and innumerable others.

3. *Law, natural or human, shall not be ridiculed, nor shall sympathy be created for its violation.*

On the index expurgatorius would be Galsworthy's *Justice*, Brieux's *The Red Robe*, Veiller's *Within The Law, et al.*

4. *Crimes against the law shall never be presented in such a way as to throw sympathy with the crime as against law and justice.*

See the above paragraph. Add the Armstrong-Mizner *The Deep Purple*, Wexley's *The Last Mile*, Galsworthy's *The Silver Box, et al.*

5. *The technique of murder must be presented in a way that will not inspire imitation.*

Strict application would prevent production of plays like Milne's *The Perfect Crime*, Zola's *Thérèse Raquin*, such melodramas as *The Two Mrs. Carrolls*, Maugham's *The Sacred Flame*, Hellman's *The Little Foxes*, and a variety of plays like *The Woman Brown, Ten Minute Alibi, Uncle Harry, Hand In Glove, Dark Hammock, etc.*

6. *Brutal killings are not to be presented in detail.*

Van Druten's *Leave Her To Heaven*, for just one example, would be denied production.

7. *Revenge in modern times shall not be justified.*

Prohibited would be O'Neill's *Mourning Becomes Electra*, Anderson's *Winterset*, Roland West's *The Unknown Pur-*

ple, *Beggars Are Coming To Town*, *Flamingo Road*, etc., etc.

8. *Theft, robbery, safe-cracking . . . should not be detailed in method.*

Plays falling under the ban would be many like *Turn To The Right*, *Alias Jimmy Valentine*, *The Jewel Robbery*, et al.

9. *With special reference to the crime of kidnapping, or illegal abduction, such stories are acceptable only when the kidnapping or abduction is (a) not the main theme of the story; (b) the person kidnapped is not a child; (c) there are no details of the crime of kidnapping; etc.*

No such play as the successful *Steele-Mitchell Post Road* could be shown.

10. *Methods of smuggling should not be presented.*

Which would interfere with plays like *Twelve Miles Out*, etc.

11. *Illegal drug traffic must never be presented.*

Illegal drug traffic has flourished unhampered on the stage since the early days of *The Queen Of The Opium Ring* and the later of *Wooden Kimono*.

12. *The use of liquor in American life, when not required by the plot or for proper characterization, must not be shown.*

Imagine the fate of dozens of English drawing-room comedies with their casual sherries and whiskey and sodas and "Won't you join me in a spot?" Imagine also, minus its casual liquor, Saroyan's *The Time Of Your Life* and *Love's Old Sweet Song*, the beer picnic of *The American Way*, the banquet of *A Parisian Romance*, and countless comedies like *Born Yesterday* and musicals like *The Merry Widow*, *The Student Prince*, and *Blossom Time*.

We come to Sex.

1. *The sanctity of the institution of marriage and the home shall be upheld.*

Censored would be Jonson's *Volpone*, at least five of Strindberg's best plays, Shaw's *Getting Married* and *Misalliance*, Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, scores of such plays as *O Mistress Mine* and *The Pirate*, and about two-thirds of the

modern French drama. Also Brieux's *The Three Daughters of M. Dupont*, Coward's *Design For Living*, Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya*, O'Neill's *Strange Interlude*, *Desire Under The Elms* and *Welded*, Hauptmann's *Gabriel Schilling's Flight*, Hervieu's *The Nippers*, Maugham's *The Circle*, etc.

2. *Adultery and illicit sex . . . must not be explicitly treated or justified, or presented attractively.* Banned would be countless plays like O'Neill's *Anna Christie*, Donnay's *The Family Boarding House*, Lonsdale's *Spring Cleaning*, Behrman's *Biography*, Franken's *Outrageous Fortune*, et al.
3. *Excessive and lustful kissing, lustful embraces . . . are not to be shown.*

Though *Sapho* was pounced upon in the theatre, it was subsequently freed by the courts and its excessive and lustful kissing and embraces were given a clean slate. Further examples: *A Fool There Was*, Odets' *Clash By Night*, *Cobra*, *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (which had to suffer much soft-soaping before it could be shown on the screen), etc.

4. *Seduction or rape should never be more than suggested. . . . They must never be shown by explicit method.*

Impossible of production would have been Tolstoi's *Resurrection*, *Lucrece*, *Johnny Belinda*, *Of Mice And Men*, *Brother Cain*, *The Voice Of The Turtle*, *Dark Of The Moon*, *The Primrose Path*, et al.

5. *They (scenes of seduction and rape) are never the proper subject for comedy.*

Impossible, too, would have been *Strictly Dishonorable*, among others.

6. *Sex perversion or any inference to it is forbidden.*

No plays like the following could be shown: Sophocles' *Œdipus*, Ford's *'Tis Pity She's A Whore*, and Donnay's *Lysistrata*, along with *The Green Bay Tree*, Oscar Wilde, Sartre's *No Exit*, *The Children's Hour*, Lenormand's *Simoon*, *One-Man Show*, *The Barretts Of Wimpole Street*, O'Neill's *Mourning Becomes Electra*, *The Cenci*, *Outrageous Fortune*, *Girls In Uniform*, et al.

7. *White slavery shall not be treated.*

playwrights. "Son-of-a-bitch" figures in *The Front Page*, *Spread Eagle*, *Born Yesterday*, and many others. "Tart" is to be found in *Ladies Of The Evening*, *The Greeks Had A Word For It*, et al. Toilet gags have been a favorite in various George Abbott productions and Olsen and Johnson shows. "Whore" is found freely in O'Neill, among others, and in the titles of such plays as Ford's *'Tis Pity She's A Whore* and Dekker's *The Honest Whore*. "Damn" has figured in even the titles of such plays as *Damn Your Honor*, *Damn The Tears*, et al., in innumerable plays like *Swan Song*, and "God damn" in the climax of Clyde Fitch's *The City*. "Hell" has been used in scores of plays and served in the final curtain line of *The Easiest Way*. "Chink" is found in Hoyt's *A Trip To Chinatown*, among a dozen or more others; "Dago" and "Wop" in *Lombardi, Ltd.*, *Moon Over Mulberry Street*, etc., etc.; and "Greaser" and "Hunkie" in many Mexican and Western and labor plays respectively. "Kike" is heard in Chodorov's *Common Ground*, and "Nigger" in the titles of *Nigger Rich* and Sheldon's *The Nigger* and in many plays about Negroes like *Strange Fruit*, *Jeb*, and *On Whitman Avenue*.

#### We come to Costume.

1. *Complete nudity is never permitted. This includes nudity in fact or in silhouette, or any licentious notice thereof by other characters.*

Shows like *Are You With It?*, *Good Night, Ladies*, etc., would be jumped upon.

2. *Undressing scenes should be avoided, and never used save where essential to the plot.*

Many musical shows would feel the axe. Likewise plays such as *Good Morning, Corporal*, *Courtesan*, *If I Were You*, *Summer Wives*, Clyde Fitch's *Girls*, Clare Boothe's *The Women*, et al.

#### We come to Religion.

1. *No film or episode may throw ridicule on any religious faith.*

Censored would be various plays like *Rebellion*, *Polygamy*,

*Susanna And The Elders, Papa Is All, Revolt, Salvation, Bridie's Tobias And The Angel, Dunsany's The Glittering Gate, and liberal portions of Bernard Shaw, to say nothing, of course, of The Merchant of Venice.*

2. *Ministers of religion in their character as ministers of religion should not be used as comic characters or as villains. This would exclude plays like The Servant In The House (vide the bishop), Shadow And Substance (vide the football playing curate), The Importance Of Being Earnest, Rain, Bride Of The Lamb, Elmer Gantry, etc., etc.*

We come to Locations.

1. *The treatment of bedrooms must be governed by good taste and delicacy.*

The ruling would interfere with such plays as Gantillon's *Maya, The Perfect Marriage, Catherine Was Great, Twin Beds, School For Brides, Bourdet's Times Have Changed, Her Cardboard Lover, Baby Mine, et al.*

We come to National Feelings.

1. *The use of the Flag shall be consistently respectful. Censored would be Spread Eagle, A Man Without A Country, and others.*

2. *The history, institutions, prominent people and citizenry of all nations shall be represented fairly.*

Prohibited would be countless such plays and shows as *East Is West, So This Is London, Caillavet and deFlers' The Green Coat, Shaw's Great Catherine and Geneva, a dozen of the better Irish plays, Marinka, Polonaise, etc., etc.*

We come to Titles.

1. *Salacious, indecent, or obscene titles shall not be used.*

Disallowed would be the titles of such plays as *The Demi-Virgin, Redlight Annie, Behind Red Lights, Sex, The Naked Genius, Virtue's Bed, A Modern Virgin, Slightly Married, Strip For Action, The Marriage Bed, She Lived Next To The Firehouse, She Couldn't Say No, Two In A Bed, Ring Twice Tonight, etc.*



We come to "Repellent Subjects."

1. *The following subjects must be treated within the careful limits of good taste:*

- a. *Third degree methods.*

Out with Charles Klein's *The Third Degree*, Bein's *Land Of Fame*, etc.

- b. *Brutality and possible gruesomeness.*

Forbidden: Odets' *Till The Day I Die*, the Guignol shocker, *Vitriol*, Dixon's *The Glansman*, *The Duke In Darkness*, *Kind Lady*, *Professor Mamlock*, et al.

- c. *Branding of people.*

Prohibited: Menander's *The Rape Of The Locks*, d'Annunzio's *The Daughter Of Jorio*, *The Cheat*, etc.

- d. *Apparent cruelty to children.*

Suppressed would be *The Two Orphans*, *Oliver Twist*, *Little Ol' Boy*, *Hickory Stick*, to say nothing of *Medea*, et al.

- e. *The sale of women, or a woman selling her virtue.*

Condemned: Sherwood's *Waterloo Bridge*, Dukes' *House Of Assignment*, Bisson's *Madame X*, Walter's *The Easiest Way*, etc. Also *Night Hawk*, *Ladies Of The Evening*, *Maya*, *The Yellow Ticket*, *Manhattan Nocturne*, *Pick-up Girl*, *Anna Lucasta*, etc., ad infinitum.

- f. *Surgical operations.*

Any play like *Sea Dogs*, with its sailor's hand chopped off, would not be allowed a showing.

We come, finally, to plays like this *The Bees And The Flowers*. It fails to uphold "the sanctity of the institution of marriage and the home." It contains a scene of "excessive and lustful kissing." Its treatment of "disgusting, unpleasant, though not necessarily evil, subjects" is not "guided by the dictates of good taste and a proper regard for the sensibilities of the audience." It indulges in "vulgar expression." It employs the word "nuts." It violates "correct standards of life." Its production would accordingly be forbidden.

Which under other and more intelligent theatrical circumstances would not be such a bad idea.

## OBSESSION. OCTOBER 1, 1946

*A play, known in the French as M. Lambertier and here previously called Jealousy, by Louis Verneuil, adapted by Jane Hinton. Produced by Homer Curran in association with Russell Lewis and Howard Young for 31 performances in the Plymouth Theatre.*

## PROGRAM

MAURICE

Basil Rathbone | NADYA

Eugenie Leontovich

SYNOPSIS: *The action, throughout, takes place in their apartment in Paris. Act I. Midnight. Act II. Early morning, two months later. Act III. The evening of the same day.*

Director: Reginald Denham.

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THE PLAY, which employs but two actors, was first produced in an adaptation by Eugene Walter in New York in 1928, with John Halliday and Fay Bainter in the roles presently served by Mr. Rathbone and Miss Leontovich. It still remains an ingenious three-act stunt, but one whose novelty, which originally stood in its theatrical favor, has worn off. When it was initially shown, these exhibits with few characters were not too familiar to local audiences and hence seemed to them not only dramaturgically very daring but even indicative of phenomenal talents in their devisers. Previous to the Verneuil play, the only Broadway item involving but two actors had been Berte Thomas' *Under Orders*, which made a similar deep impression. Since that time, however, plays retailed by small casts — one, two, three, and four actors — have been more or less common and have been taken on their merits rather than on the earlier score of their unusualness.

Verneuil, as might be expected, handles the theme of marital jealousy in typical French boulevard fashion, nimbly so far as it superficially goes but without much real insight or psychological body. He writes, plainly, for

mere popular entertainment, not for a purpose any more notable. Compare his treatment of the green emotion with, say, that of the Russian Artzybasheff in his play *Jealousy* and the difference is that of emerald and spinach. Artzybasheff uses a chisel; Verneuil, a paper-cutter. I quote in example a few passages from the Russian's philosophy of love which went into the handling of the theme:

"Maeterlinck, in one of his dramas, pictures a scene in the Kingdom of Unborn Souls where weary old Time is solemnly marking the hour for each soul to be born. The souls of two lovers are about to be separated, and the one that is leaving implores the one that must remain to give some signal, when its time comes, by which they may recognize each other. . . . What a deep and tragic symbol!"

"That monogamy is against man's nature is a truth that would have been universally admitted long ago were our minds not perverted by the spirit of hypocrisy, which teaches (Pushkin) that 'an elevating lie is more precious than the darkness of degrading truth.'"

"When someone dares to say or write that love is based on purely physical attraction, society brands him a cynic and a corrupter of youth. Society has not yet realized the fact that literature is just as important and as serious as science."

"It is strange that society, putting such a high value on the spirit and such a low value on the body, permits married people to share their spiritual riches with others, but keeps a watchful eye that they preserve untouched exactly that which is considered of little value and even unworthy of man."

"The woman sees no harm in being surrounded by men who do not disguise their wish to possess her; she considers it neither shameful nor repulsive to be the common object of passionate desire. The jealousy of her husband only irritates and insults her. It is an encroachment on her personal liberty. In order to retain that liberty, she must lie to her husband, even if in fact she is true to him. On the other hand, the husband cannot fail to see what

these men want from his wife. And, added to the natural jealousy of the male, he feels the anguish of shame and the pangs of wounded pride. Fearing to appear ridiculous, he must play the role of a blind simpleton. . . ."

Or compare the knowing humor of the Austrian Schnitzler's treatment of jealousy in *Anatol*, or, to limit oneself relevantly to the later moderns, the wise drollery in the same matter of even Verneuil's fellow boulevard dramatist, Guitry.

Verneuil, in truth, is often either fraudulently theatrical or naturally childish. He presents us with a man who has lived with a woman for a considerable period, who suspects with good reason that she has had at least two lovers before him, and who seemingly has not bothered in the least about it until the night when eventually he marries her. In other words, though the playwright does not suggest that the man regards marriage as a sacrament, he would have us believe that a lover is never jealous of his inamorata and that jealousy is reserved to wedlock alone. He further would have us believe that this man, an educated and successful dramatist who has enjoyed a repertoire of mistresses and is perfectly worldly, would select the moment he first is about to go to honeymoon bed with his belated wife for the explosion of a jealousy which in the years before with her he evidently did not feel. These and various other such amatory idiosyncrasies are, moreover, related largely in such familiar French boulevard theatrical terms as causing the heroine in preparation for bed to spend much time undressing from an elaborate costume and dressing into an even more elaborate one and as further delaying the hypothetically overwhelming mutual desire for copulation with endless cigarettes, glasses of champagne, looks out of the window at nocturnal Paris, and conversation.

After an hour of trying desperately to interest oneself in any such economical two actor exhibit, there are moments when one longs for the added appearance of even Mr. Luther Adler.

As the hero, Mr. Rathbone, who is as French as a spritz'l,

invested his art for the most part in the elegances of Sulka dressing robes. In the heroine's role, Miss Leontovich, studiously aided by Adrian, the Hollywood dress designer, no less studiously confined her articulation to the lines of her figure. There were times, indeed, when one was not sure that what one was watching was an actress or a self-satisfied couturier's model. Reginald Denham's direction had the two players adjust themselves in so many intricately horizontal amorous embraces, all conscious of what in Hollywood are called camera angles, that all the evening needed to make it satisfactory from an acting viewpoint was the summary injunction, "Cut!"

## HEAR THAT TRUMPET. OCTOBER 7, 1946

*A play by Orin Jannings. Produced by Arthur Hopkins for 8 performances in the Playhouse.*

### PROGRAM

MUMFORD (clarinet)	ABBA (bass viol)	Bart Edwards
Sidney Bechet	ROCCO (drums)	Marty Marsala
ALONZO ARMONK Frank Conroy	ERICA MARLOWE	Audra Lindley
DINGER RICHARDSON (trumpet)	SKIPPY (trombone)	Philip Layton
Bobby Sherwood	SALLY BELLE	Lynne Carter
FLOYD AMERY (piano) Ray Mayer	CLEASY	Raymond Bramley

**SYNOPSIS:** *The entire action of the play takes place in Dinger's and Floyd's rooms, Chicago. Act I. Scene 1. About 3:00 a.m. Spring, 1945. Scene 2. Two weeks later. 5:00 p.m. Act II. Scene 1. Two months later. 6:00 a.m. Scene 2. Three weeks later. Early afternoon. Scene 3. Two weeks later. Late afternoon. Act III. Late the same night.*

Director: Arthur Hopkins.

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**T**HE GROUND-PLAN of the play is the saga of a small, minor jazz band made up in part of a couple of former servicemen and an elderly Negro. The execution, save for a few moments now and then, suggests a dramatic revue consisting of scenes and episodes from a variety of previous plays. The wealthy protector of the girl who falls in love with the young band leader stops at nothing to get back his mistress, as in *The Easiest Way*. The girl, having married the young leader who falls on evil days, offers her body again to the wealthy one in order to get help for her husband, as, in one paraphrase or another, in *Bought And Paid For*, *The Road To Rome*, and a dozen earlier plays, French, German, etc. There is indignation over prejudice against the Negro, as in fourteen different plays during the previous six seasons. There is an even more indignant scene involving the cruel treatment by civilians of ex-servicemen, as in *Skydrift, et al.* Several of the band members comport themselves like characters out of Saroyan's *The*

*Time Of Your Life* and *Once Around The Block*. The scene in which the girl spends the night with the band leader, but piously reveals the next morning that they were married just before she accompanied him home is an echo of at least half a dozen such scenes in plays like *Good Morning, Corporal*, etc. The scene in which the heroine poisons the villain's drink has figured in more plays than one can remember. The girl's mystical speeches sound like bad Chekhov mixed with worse Odets. And so on. What small virtues the script has consist in several lines of dialogue either freshly humorous or sharply observant, in quickly firing off the two plea elements noted and not overly booming them, and in the characterization of the piano-playing alcoholic, if certainly not the routine police department inspector, the baby-voiced, dumb moll, the wealthy protector of the girl, and the girl herself.

The author's failure lies in his attempt to project his theme, already muddled as it is, with elliptical dramaturgy which turns out to be so elliptical as to be inscrutable. Nor are matters helped by Mr. Hopkins' direction, which still pursues his old directorial credo that a sense of naturalness and life is best to be obtained by allowing the actors to conduct themselves as they normally would off the stage. What is obtained is more generally less a sense of naturalness and life than one of a lot of actors who have not had enough rehearsals. I, among others, have been trying politely to point this out to Mr. Hopkins for some twenty or more years now, but he persists in adhering to his original conviction. In the beginning, when such direction was a novelty and a relief from the overelaborate, hammy direction of the period, the effect, though sometimes critically dubious, was not so bad. But there is no critical lesson for audiences like time, and with the passing of time the practical absurdity of the device has become increasingly evident. Mr. Hopkins should take to heart the words of the late Raymond Clapper: "Some people, once they adopt an idea, bury it in the ground and go on the rest of their lives defending it, without ever re-examining it to see whether time and the elements have

caused it to decay into a worthless handful of dust. In that way you can be always consistent — and often wrong.”

Bobby Sherwood, as the band leader, and Ray Mayer, as the pianist drunk, the former a well-known trumpet and guitar player whose jazz band was for some time a pet of the bobby-soxers but who was without previous acting experience, and the latter, with but minor stage experience, were both excellent. Sidney Bechet, as the Negro clarinet, offered a pleasant and winning personality in lieu of any perceptible acting and, since he was the object of the plot's prejudice and intolerance, was naturally applauded by both the sympathetic audience and critics for the performance he didn't give. In the role of the girl, Audra Lindley on the other hand offered all kinds of acting, if nothing resembling anything that critically goes by the term. As the comedy-relief moll, Lynne Carter purveyed a very poor imitation of Judy Holliday; and in the role of the girl's elderly protector, Frank Conroy, except for the scene in which he is poisoned, composed his histrionic art either in muting his lines to the point where they were partly unintelligible or in growling them with such bull-dog virtuosity that they were wholly so.



## CYRANO DE BERGERAC. OCTOBER 8, 1946

*A revival of the play by Edmond Rostand in the adaptation by Brian Hooker, with incidental music by Paul Bowles. Produced by José Ferrer for 195 performances in, initially, the Alvin Theatre.*

## PROGRAM

PORTER	Benedict McQuarrie	VICOMTE DE VALVERT	
A CAVALIER	Samuel N. Kirkham		Anthony Jordan
A MUSKETEER	George B. Oliver	MONTFLEURY	Leopold Badia
A LACKEY	Stewart Long	CYRANO DE BERGERAC	José Ferrer
ANOTHER LACKEY	Ralph Meeker	BELLROSE	Howard Wierum
A GUARDSMAN	Charles Summers	JODELET	Robinson Stone
FLOWER GIRL	Phyllis Hill	A MEDDLER	Francis Letton
A CITIZEN	Wallace Widdecombe	A SOUBRETTE	Mary Jane Kersey
HIS SON	Walter Kelly	A COMEDIENNE	Jacqueline Soans
A CUT PURSE	Nick Dennis	LISE	Nan McFarland
ORANGE GIRL	Patricia Wheel	CARBON DE CASTEL-JALOUX	
A MARQUIS	John O'Connor		Francis Compton
BRISSAILLE	Bert Whitley	A POET	Vincent Donahue
LIGNIERE	Robert Carroll	ANOTHER POET	Leonardo Cimino
CHRISTIAN DE NEUVILLETTTE		A CAPUCHIN	Robinson Stone
	Ernest Graves	A CADET	Paul Wilson
RAGUENEAU	Hiram Sherman	SISTER MARTHE	Jacqueline Soans
LE BRET	William Woodson	MOTHER MARGUERITE	
ROXANE, NEE MADELEINE ROBIN			Nan McFarland
	Frances Reid	SISTER CLAIRE	Phyllis Hill
HER DUENNA	Paula Laurence	A NUN	Patricia Wheel
COMTE DE GUICHE	Ralph Clanton		

SYNOPSIS: *The first four acts take place in 1640; the fifth, 1655. Act I. A performance at the Hotel de Bourgogne. Act II. The bakery of the poets. Act III. Roxane's kiss. Act IV. The Cadets of Gascoyne. Act V. Cyrano's Gazette.*

Director: Melchor G. Ferrer.

TO AN AGE which pridefully, for all the rebuffs it suffers, imagines that it is sternly realistic, the play must seem like the libretto of a romantic operetta of the long ago, a superior libretto to be sure, but a libretto none the less, and

one somewhat wrinkled. First produced in France in 1897, its plumed romance and extravagant improbabilities have to such an age the ring of a rusty bell, sometimes still faintly silvery yet on the whole no little flat and deadened. But to those whose tastes are not arbitrarily conditioned by changing times, its fairy tale for adults still in its poetic raptures and humors provides a holiday from the enveloping drabness and in its fantastic strumming of the E-string still a foolish and happy vacation from a prosy world. Though a contrived piece of dramatic writing—it now and again suggests a Scribe alcoholized to the point of song—and though its optimistic romantic expression sometimes suggests a stage-door Johnny waiting bouquet in hand at the back entrance to the Louvre, some of its scenes are among the stage's most pleasantly remembered. And while essentially it may be little more than a juke-box *de luxe* and while its heroic bravado may impress the more resistantly realistic as the crowing of a mechanical rooster, there remains in its organism, as I observed some time ago, all the handsome bravery of all those creatures amongst us on earth from whom a careless Providence withheld at birth the prettier gifts it bestowed on luckier men.

That the play has hardly profited from most of its various English translations and adaptations is generally allowed. Of the five with which I am acquainted—Kingsbury's, Hall's, Norman's, Whitehall's, and this of Hooker's—only the last named is in the aggregate satisfactory, and even it has its several shortcomings. In the others, there is altogether too slavish a literality, too awkward a sense of word values, and too little awareness of the dramatic modifications of the two different stages. Hooker's adaptation, for all its other virtues, is similarly weakened at several points by a lack of true feel for dramatic effect.

I give just one illustrative example. Whatever critical view one may hold of the play, few can deny that its final curtain is one of the most impressive in romantic dramatic literature. I recall it to you, however, as we get it in Hooker's version.

Thus, the dying Cyrano:

Yes, all my laurels you have riven away  
And all my roses; yet in spite of you  
There is one crown I bear away with me,  
And tonight, when I enter before God,  
My salute shall sweep all the stars away  
From the blue threshold! One thing without  
stain,

Unspotted from the world, in spite of doom  
Mine own!

*(He springs forward, his sword aloft)*

And that is . . .

*(The sword escapes from his hand; he totters,  
and falls into the arms of Le Bret and Rague-  
neau)*

Roxane: *(bending over him and kissing him on the  
forehead)*

— That is . . .

Cyrano: *(opening his eyes and smiling up at her)*  
My white plume!

It is obvious that the adjective "white" (in Kingsbury's version it is "unsullied," in Whitehall's "undishonored") is redundant and enfeebles the ring of the tag line for the English-speaking stage. Hall and Norman, though their versions, as noted, are otherwise deficient, wisely delete it. Though, furthermore, the Hall version is in the main one of the poorest, at least the phrasing here is better than Hooker's. In place of the latter's "And tonight, when I enter before God, my salute shall sweep all the stars away from the blue threshold, one thing without stain, unspotted from the world, in spite of doom mine own" — in place we have "and tonight, when I enter God's house, in saluting broadly will I sweep the azure threshold with what despite of all I carry forth unblemished and un-  
bent. . . ."

What, in short, is needed is a translation-adaptation rid of the otherwise sketchy greasepaints in Hall no less than in Kingsbury, the strain for exactness in Norman, the un-

musical rhythms and grim precision in Whitehall, and the theatrical-dramatic lapses in Hooker.

The play, as is sufficiently known, was written by Rostand expressly for the great solovox competences of Coquelin. Save an actor have such a vocal equipment, the Cyrano role loses its vital flamboyance and romantic brio and the lines are likely to take on the color of a motion picture Romeo handicapped by a defective sound track. Coquelin, gifted with the proper voice, was everything that Rostand wished for. "It was to the soul of Cyrano that I intended to dedicate this poem," he wrote, somewhat sentimentously, "but since that soul has been reborn in you, Coquelin, it is to you that I dedicate it." Substitute voice for soul and, less fancily and a whole lot more honestly, you would have what Rostand really meant—or should have. Richard Mansfield, who played the role first in this country—the simultaneously produced Augustin Daly abortion of the play with Charles Richman not counting—had the necessary acting ability in other directions but a voice that, while sufficient in certain of its aspects, lacked the necessary sweep and at times had the harmonic effect of suddenly encountering a dead black ivory on the role's keyboard. Walter Hampden enjoyed the voice, at least in much greater degree, and, though sometimes hardly the actor for the role in other particulars, brought to it what first and foremost it needs. Ferrer, though he reads clearly and intelligently, simply has not the vocal range and resonance. His is a good voice such as it is, but here without the demanded variety of heroic phrasing and, if you will, romantic ham vibrance which the part prays for. He begins well enough, but monotony of delivery gradually converts his performance from the theatrical heroic into the recitational.

The Roxane of Frances Reid is pleasant to the eye but is more the brittle modern young woman than the feminine bouquet Rostand fashioned. Ernest Graves is a fairish Christian; Hiram Sherman, usually an actor of wit, a mediocre Ragueneau; Ralph Clanton a serviceable de Guiche; and William Woodson a better than usual Le

Bret. Lemuel Ayres' settings and costumes are commendable; the incidental music by Paul Bowles is of negligible merit; and the stage direction by Melchor Ferrer, assisted by Guthrie McClintic, poor in its groupings, too strainfully accelerated in pace, and guilty of not warning the actors against such pronunciations as "alwis" for "always" and "impossable" for "impossible."

## THE ICEMAN COMETH. OCTOBER 9, 1946

*A play in four acts by Eugene O'Neill. Produced by the Theatre Guild for 136 performances in the Martin Beck Theatre.*

### PROGRAM

HARRY HOPE	<i>Dudley Digges</i>	ROCKY PIOGGI	<i>Tom Pedi</i>
ED MOSHER	<i>Morton L. Stevens</i>	DAN PARRITT	<i>Paul Crabtree</i>
PAT MCGLOIN	<i>Al McGranary</i>	PEARL	<i>Ruth Gilbert</i>
WILLIE OBAN	<i>E. G. Marshall</i>	MARGIE	<i>Jeanne Cagney</i>
JOE MOTT	<i>John Marriott</i>	CORA	<i>Marcella Markham</i>
PIET WETJOEN	<i>Frank Tweddell</i>	CHUCK MORELLO	<i>Joe Marr</i>
CECIL LEWIS	<i>Nicholas Joy</i>	THEODORE HICKMAN	<i>James Barton</i>
JAMES CAMERON	<i>Russell Collins</i>	MORAN	<i>Michael Wyler</i>
HUGO KALMAR	<i>Leo Chalzel</i>	LIEB	<i>Charles Hart</i>
LARRY SLADE	<i>Carl Benton Reid</i>		

SYNOPSIS: Act I. *Back room and a section of the bar at Harry Hope's. Early morning in summer, 1912.* Act II. *The same. Around midnight of the same day.* Act III. *Bar and a section of the back room. Morning of the following day.* Act IV. *Same as Act I. Back room and a section of the bar. Around 1:30 of the next day.*

Director: *Eddie Dowling.*

WITH THE APPEARANCE of this long awaited work, our theatre has become dramatically alive again. It makes most of the plays of other American playwrights produced during the more than twelve-year period of O'Neill's absence look comparatively like so much damp tissue paper. In it there is an understanding of the deeper elements of human nature, a comprehension of the confused instincts that make up the life of mortals, and an evocation of pity for the tortured existence of dazed mankind that not merely most but all of those plays in combination have not faintly suggested. It is, in short, one of the best of its author's works and one that again firmly secures his position not only as the first of American dramatists but, with

Shaw and O'Casey, one of the three really distinguished among the world's living.

These, I appreciate, are big words and probably contributive to the suspicion that their inditer has foregone his old Phyrionism. They are also doubtless obnoxious and challenging to such persons as either resent what seems to be extravagant praise at the expense of other playwrights or are constitutionally averse to superlatives of any kind and ready to throw off their coats if anyone has the gall to say even that Bach was the greatest composer who ever lived or that horseradish sauce is the best of all things to go with boiled beef. But the words, I believe, are none the less in good order. If they are not and if the play is not what I think it is, I am prepared to atone for my ignorance by presenting gratis to anyone who can offer convincing contrary evidence the complete bound works of all our American playwrights from Bronson Howard through Charles Klein, David Belasco and Augustus Thomas down to the geniuses responsible for *Joan of Lorraine*, *Another Part Of The Forest*, *Dream Girl*, and *Maid In The Ozarks*.

Laying hold of an assortment of social outcasts quartered in a disreputable saloon on the fringe of New York in the year 1912 and introducing into their drunken semblance of contentful hope an allergy in the shape of a Werlean traveling salesman, O'Neill distils from them, slowly but inexorably, the tragedy that is death in life. Superficially at times suggesting a cross between Gorki's *The Lower Depths* and Saroyan's *The Time Of Your Life*, let alone Ibsen's *The Wild Duck*, the play with its author's uncommon dramaturgical skill gradually weaves its various vagrant threads into a solid thematic pattern and in the end achieves a purge and mood of compassion that mark it apart from the bulk of contemporary drama. There are repetitions in the middle sections which O'Neill has deemed necessary to the impact of the play but which in this opinion might be got rid of with no loss. There is also still an excess of profanity, for all the author's liberal cutting, that becomes disturbing to any ear that gags at such facile overemphasis. And since the uncut version of *Ham-*

let, which is a good play too, can be played in its entirety in little more than three and a half hours, the longer running time of *The Iceman Cometh* may seem to some, and quite rightly, not only superfluous but a little pretentious. Yet small matter. In the whole history of drama there has been only one really perfect tragedy — incidentally, only one-third as long — and, while this of O'Neill's is scarcely to be compared with it, it still rises far above its possible errors.

With a few nimble strokes, O'Neill pictures vividly the innards of even the least of his variegated characters, from the one-time circus grifter to the one-time police lieutenant, from the quondam boss of a Negro gambling den to the erstwhile Boer War correspondent, and from the night and the day bartenders and the wreck of a college graduate to the former editor of Anarchist magazines and the old captain once in the British armed services. Only in the characters of his three street-walkers does he work rather obviously; truthfully, perhaps, but in a theatrically routine manner. Yet in his major figures, Slade, the one-time Syndicalist-Anarchist, Hickey, the hardware salesman, Hope, the proprietor of the saloon, etc., the hand is as steady and sure as ever.

The long monologue, only now and then momentarily interrupted, wherein toward the drama's conclusion the salesman relates the relief from himself secured by the murder of his wife, is one of the most impressive pieces of writing in contemporary dramatic literature: emotionally searching and definitely moving. The relations of Slade and the young man with memory of his betrayed mother on his agonized conscience are maneuvered with high suspensive dexterity, even if at one or two points to the hypercritical slightly overplanted. The dialogue throughout is driving; there is robust humor to alleviate the atmospheric sordidness; and out of the whole emerge in no small degree the profound essences of authentic tragedy.

In the author's own analysis of his play as he has confided it to me the dominant intention has been a study in the workings of strange friendship. That intention, it is



not to be gainsaid, has been fully realized. But as I read the script and see it in stage action it seems to me that, far above and beyond it, there rises the theme of the tragedy which lies in bogus self-substantiation and the transient, pitiable satisfaction which it bequeaths. That, however, is the play's virtue: to different men it may convey different things. But to all with any emotional understanding and to all with any appreciation of the drama it must convey the satisfaction of a theatre that, if only for a short while, has again come into its rightful own.

In a setting by Robert Edmond Jones which catches perfectly the atmosphere of the play and with lighting that alternately gives the stage and groupings the effect of Daumier and George Bellows, Eddie Dowling, with many acceptable critical suggestions from the author, has accomplished an impressive example of direction. In only two or three details has he missed, and the fault in those cases was scarcely his. O'Neill's men's toilet to the far left of the stage with the "This Is It" sign is gratuitous, since it is strangely, even phenomenally, never once used by any of the hard-drinking denizens of the saloon and since it thus serves no purpose and is simply a gesture in juvenile wag-gery. Dowling's idea that it be given some small justification by installing Hugo Kalmar, the drooling Anarchist editor, in it at one point and having him declaim his parrot lines from its interior — and excellent comedy touch that would have suited the action with no slightest violation of the text — was vetoed by O'Neill. The play's ending, which presently goes a little flat, might also, as Dowling wished, have been inspirited if, as counterpoint to Slade's final "Be God, I'm the only real convert to death Hickey made here; from the bottom of my coward's heart I mean that now!," the drunken singing and wild pounding on the table by the assembled, happily unredeemed bibuli had not been cut by the author and had been moved a bit forward from its place in the original script. And if the director had been allowed to lend a greater touch of his familiar "mood" staging to the play, which he was not, the spirit of the drama would have been materially aided.

Except for James Barton's reading of the extended monologue, which is so fumblingly and poorly done that it disastrously drops the drama at its most important point (the role should have been played by Dowling himself; he could do nothing, he found, to alter Barton's method), along with Carl Benton Reid's minstrel-show-interlocutor Slade, the performances from first to last are admirable, in particular those of Dudley Digges, Morton L. Stevens, Nicholas Joy, Russell Collins, Tom Pedi (who is superb as the Italian bartender-pimp), and Paul Crabtree. In all, to repeat, a drama wrought brilliantly out of the time-honored theme of man's pitiable necessity for illusion and played for the most part, at least up to a few minutes of its final curtain, in the true manner of real theatre.

O'Neill is the only dramatist in the history of the American theatre who has achieved real world status. His plays have been produced in most of the civilized countries of the globe; he has been awarded the Nobel prize for the body of his work; he has been the subject of critical discussion in South America, England, Germany, France, Italy, Greece, Russia, the Scandinavian lands, the Balkans, Australia, Japan and China. Almost as much has been written about him as about one-half all the living playwrights rolled together. Only Shaw has consumed more space.

In the United States, South America, France, Italy, Russia, the Scandinavian countries, Rumania, Greece, Australia, Japan and China, the critical attitude toward him in the main has been extremely favorable. In Germany, when criticism was operating freely, it was, with a few exceptions, highly appreciative. In England alone has there most often been either a luke-warm or chilly attitude toward him.

Here in America his preëminence as the first dramatist of his nation is taken by the great majority of the critics for granted. Now and again a small voice from the sidelines lifts itself in contradiction and puts in some peculiar nomination for the honor, but in the aggregate his position is unchallenged. In France, where his plays have had their chief hearing at the hands of Pitoëff, all save one or

two of the recognized critics have been impressed. In Russia, praise of him has been pretty uniform, and understandably, since his dramatic philosophy and usual attitude toward his subject matter find a sympathetic echo in the Slav temperament. In Italy, those of his plays that have been shown have fared well at most critical hands; his *Days Without End*, which strikes a Catholic note, has received the Church's imprimatur and has been produced under the auspices of the Vatican. South America has paid him homage. Sweden has acclaimed him, and so has the theatre of Norway. Various of his plays have proved successes, both popular and critical, in Rumania, and Hungary, though to a lesser degree, has received him with hospitality. German critics, save in the few instances noted, have in the past treated him with respect, and in Japan and China the younger element, which alone is interested dramatically in the outside world, regards him, along with Shaw, as the most important of the Western playwrights.

On the other hand, though he has intermittently been accepted in England and even treated with considerable esteem by men of letters like Spender, *et al.*, the general run of drama criticism has frequently shown misgivings about him. In some cases, indeed, the misgivings have been accompanied by lofty derision.

For an example of the English attitude, we may turn to Eric Bentley and his recent observations in *The Playwright As Thinker*. I quote four typical samples:

- a. "Among the untragic tragedians the most spectacular is Eugene O'Neill. At everything in the theatre except being tragic and being comic he is a success. . . . Tragedy is transported to the intense inane. . . . The tension that is missing in his work is inner tension."
- b. "O'Neill has not as yet been able adequately to represent the bourgeois world as the nightmare which in the twentieth century it became, though his portraits of neurosis and decay are a labored and overconscious striving in that direction. O'Neill's more powerful, *unconsciously* symbolic tendency was to try to flee the bourgeois world, not like

Wedekind by standing it on its head, but by trying to deny its existence, by proclaiming exclusive reality for the eternal. It was O'Neill himself who stood on his head."

- c. "T. S. Eliot's 'conception' (in *The Family Reunion*) is clear, noble, and mature. . . . O'Neill's 'conception' (in *Mourning Becomes Electra*) is rude, simple-minded, gaga."
- d. "Where Wedekind seems silly and turns out on further inspection to be profound, O'Neill seems profound and turns out on further inspection to be silly. . . . O'Neill has yet to show us he has a mind. So far he has only been earnest after the fashion of the popular pulpit or of professors who write on the romance of reality. Precisely because he pretends to be too much, he attains too little. He is false, and he is false in a particularly unpleasant way. His art is *faux-bon*. The 'good clean fun' of a Hitchcock movie is better."

Since every critic has a right to his opinion, and in view of the differences thereof which have been O'Neill's portion, I now that he has reappeared with *The Iceman Cometh* as a produced dramatist venture my own on the plays which he has contributed to the stage since first he began to function. In chronological compositional order, here-with the plays and the present commentator's views on them in *piccolo*:

1913-14. *Thirst* and four other one-act plays. Wholly negligible and plainly the work of a novice.

1914. *Bound East For Cardiff*. The first of his sea plays and the first indication of a significant new dramatic talent. A striking performance containing the seed of its author's future mental cast.

1916. *Before Breakfast*. A trifle. Little in it to encourage the critical hopes found in *Bound East For Cardiff*.

1917. *In The Zone*, *Ile*, *The Long Voyage Home*, *The Moon Of The Caribbees*. The hopes were here reinforced in this rounding out of the cycle of short sea plays. *In The Zone* is the weakest of the four, melodramatically effective but built around an all too obvious theatrical device. *Ile* and *The Long Voyage Home*, however, show an advance in character portrayal, thematic feel, and dramaturgical

expertness. *The Moon Of The Caribbees*, the best of the four plays, is remarkable for the dramatic capturing of a mood and its projection. It remains one of the few genuinely important one-act plays in American dramatic literature.

1918. *The Rope, Beyond The Horizon, The Dreamy Kid, Where The Cross Is Made*. *The Rope* is an only fair excursion into psychopathic melodrama. *Beyond The Horizon*, his first full-length play (there were two or three written in his nonage which he destroyed and of which no traces remain), may be said to have influenced perceptibly the course of American drama. Its honest realism filtered through a poetic impulse came as a revelation to a stage chiefly given over, at its serious best, to rhinestone imagination and, at its worst, to vacuity illuminated by Broadway lamplight. While here and there suggesting a certain infirmity in dramaturgy, it betokened clearly the more finished work that was to come. *The Dreamy Kid* was and is a distinctly minor effort, and of no consequence. *Where The Cross Is Made*, the germ of the later full-length play, *Gold*, was and remains a fabricated one-acter partly redeemed by a potentially serviceable thematic idea.

1919. *Chris, The Straw*. Produced briefly in Philadelphia and withdrawn, *Chris* was a crude attempt at the play, *Anna Christie*, into which it was subsequently developed. *The Straw*, in its treatment of tuberculosis, is an unusual achievement of a difficult dramatic problem. Its emotional orchestration is one of O'Neill's best accomplishments.

1920. *Gold, Anna Christie, The Emperor Jones, Different*. *Gold*, though possessing several unmistakable virtues, fails in its entirety because of intermittent aberrant planning and uncertain playwriting. *Anna Christie* is a new and forceful handling of a familiar theme, deep in its characterizations, driving in its firm composition, and etched with real observation and understanding. *The Emperor Jones* is a masterpiece of its kind. Its cumulative dramatic effect is irresistible. The tom-toms starting, in Richard Dana Skinner's apt phrase, at the rate of the human

pulse beat and rising bit by bit as a fevered pulse would rise and which are of the warp and woof of the drama itself, sweep one along and up into a mighty climax and leave one without breath. Into this study of the Negro's dream of release from bondage to the whites and, upon the dream's coming true, his defeat by the very tricks of the whites which in practise have brought him release, or what he images is release, O'Neill has introduced a symbolic fancy uncommon to American dramatic writing. The succeeding *Diff'rent*, however, is of small moment, a feeble distillation of Strindberg further debilitated by its author's handling of its materials.

1921. *The First Man*, *The Hairy Ape*. The former, with the later *Welded*, is one of O'Neill's two worst full-length performances. Here again, in both cases, close imitation of Strindberg has brought its penalties. Aping the technic of Strindberg, as I observed at the time, O'Neill sets himself so to intensify and even hyperbolize a theme as to evoke the dramatic effect from its overtones rather than, as is the more general manner, from its undertones. His attempt is to duplicate the technic of such a drama as *The Father*, the power of which is derived not by suggestion and implication but from the sparks that fly upward from a prodigious and deafening pounding on the anvil. The attempt is a failure, for all that one gets in O'Neill's case is the prodigious and deafening pounding; the sparks simply will not come out. Now and again one discerns something that looks vaguely like a spark, but on closer inspection it turns out to be only an artificial theatrical firefly which has been cunningly concealed up the actors' sleeves. The author goes aground on the rocks of exaggeration and overemphasis. His philosophical melodrama is so full of psychological revolver shots, jumps off the Brooklyn Bridge, incendiary Chinamen, galloping hose carts, forest fires, wild locomotives, sawmills, dynamite kegs, time fuses, infernal machines, battles under the sea, mine explosions, Italian black-handers, sinking ocean liners, fights to the death on rafts, and last-minute pardons that the effect is akin to reading a treatise on the theme on a bump-the-bumps. He rolls up

his sleeves and piles on the agony with the assiduity of a coalheaver. He here misjudges, it seems to me completely, the Strindberg method. O'Neill intensifies his theme from without. He piles psychological and physical situation on situation until the structure topples over with a burlesque clatter. Strindberg magnified the psyches of his characters. O'Neill here magnifies their actions.

*The Hairy Ape* is in a class apart. Partly expressionistic and written with greater restraint if with greatly increased and sounder dramatic intensity, the play dramatizes its theme of despairing humanity gazing blinded at the stars with a signal drive.

1922. *The Fountain*. A very uneven and not particularly successful fantasy dealing with the quest of Ponce de Leon. Some of the writing is eloquent, but more seems labored. The protagonist is described as "a romantic dreamer governed by the ambitious thinker in him." The protagonist's confusion is shared by the playwright.

1923. *Welded, All God's Chillun Got Wings*. As for the former, see the above comment on *The First Man*. *All God's Chillun Got Wings* is a study of miscegenation wrought with honesty, sympathetic comprehension, and proficient dramaturgy. Its basic idea, the tragic difficulty in man's acceptance of reality and truth, is boiled out of the theme with a steaming emotionalism and persuasion.

1924. *Desire Under The Elms*. The Strindberg influence is here again clear, but in this instance O'Neill has exercised greater caution and selection and has not allowed himself so fully to be dominated. The result is a drama of passion and incest that does not get out of hand and that by and large amounts to a satisfactory realistic treatment of some of the elements in the classic Greek drama.

1925. *Marco Millions, The Great God Brown*. *Marco Millions* is a witty satire, crossed with the poetic mood, dealing with the exploits of that prototype of the American go-getter, Marco Polo. It is everything that *The Fountain* is not. Much of the writing is delightful and the sentiment in, for example, the little Princess Kukachin's eager search for the lost suggestion of her hero's soul has real

body. *The Great God Brown*, with its employment of masks, is one of O'Neill's major efforts and in many respects comes off laudably despite the difficult problems it offers to stage presentation. The psychological essences of the drama are craftily distilled and, for all the complexities projected by the frequent mask-changing on the part of the characters, the play manages much of the impression designed by its author. What confusion there is is less inherent in the theme than in the mechanical adornments visited upon it.

1926. *Lazarus Laughed*. An unsuccessful attempt at what seems to be operatic Biblical fantasy. Less a theatre play than a libretto.

1927. *Strange Interlude*. A notable contribution to the drama. On an unusually broad canvas, O'Neill has plumbed the psyche of a woman in relation to her men with a handsome understanding. His knowledge of character has never been better displayed by him. There are one or two moments when matters seem to evade him, but he thereafter recaptures his purpose and pushes ahead with entire comprehension. On the whole, a psychological drama again touched by the Strindberg philosophy which leaves its immediate subject matter convincingly exhausted.

1928. *Dynamo*. A conflict between the depths and surfaces of man resolved into a drama that is overwritten, overstuffed, and that does not come off. Isolated scenes are dramatically stimulating, but the drama in its entirety becomes lost in its own tortuous philosophical alleys and leaves one with the impression that less symbolism and more simplicity would have served the playwright's purpose infinitely better.

1931. *Mourning Becomes Electra*. A fine paraphrase of the classic Greek drama. Bringing the incestuous theme of revenge into modern recognition, O'Neill has fashioned a tragedy that stands largely on independent feet and that presents his dramaturgical gifts in full flower.

1932. *Ah, Wilderness!* Turning from tragedy to comedy, the author has here achieved the tenderest and most amus-



ing comedy of boyhood in the American drama. It is an answer to those who believe that he is without humor, a belief held apparently by such as have engaged some of his antecedent work with a predetermined lack of humor.

1933. *Days Without End*. Rewriting has spoiled a play that in its original conception was not without some merit. As it stands, it is an anachronistic treatment of its single-standard sex theme wedded to psychic release through religious faith. The many revisions made by the author in his several earlier drafts weakened the play's directness and have botched it. A poor performance.

1939. *The Iceman Cometh*. One of O'Neill's top achievements. A drama of the submerged tenth which, as previously noted, vaguely suggests Gorki's *The Lower Depths* but which is not only an immeasurably better play but one that explores the confused and agonized souls of mankind with rare understanding and with powerful dramatic result.

Two additional plays have been completed during the last four years and are awaiting metropolitan production: *A Moon For The Misbegotten*, already tried out in the Mid-West, and *A Touch Of The Poet*. Pending a view of them, what is O'Neill's critical status to date?

That he is the foremost dramatist in the American theatre is, as has been recorded, generally granted. His eminence is predicated on the fact that no other has anything like his ability to delve into and appraise character, his depth of knowledge of his fellow man, his sweep and pulse and high resolve, his command of a theatre stage and all its manifold workings, and his mastery of the intricacies of dramaturgy. His plays at their best have in them a real universality. His characters are not specific, individual, and isolated types but active symbols of mankind in general, with mankind's virtues and faults, gropings and findings, momentary triumphs and doomed defeats. He writes not for a single theatre but for all theatres of the world.

It is argued by some against him that he is no poet, and that his drama hence misses true stature. Specifically and in the conventional sense, he may not be, but he is never-

theless, as must be evident to the close student of his work, driven ever by the poetic spirit. His weakness, where and when it exists, lies in his excesses — the excesses of overlength, overemphasis, overembroidery and overmelodramatization of the psychological aspects of his drama and of that drama itself. At his worst, these qualities edge him close to brooding travesty.

He has worked expertly in the field of tragedy, nimbly in the field of comedy, and less happily in that of fantasy. His brutality in tragedy is a handmaiden of the truth as he sees it. He can not compromise with himself, right or wrong. Uncommonly gifted in a knowledge of the theatre, it may seem to some that he resorts occasionally to critically invalid devices to further his dramatic ends. If he does so, he does so unconsciously, never with calculation and deliberately. He would be content, I am assured, to publish his plays and forego the profits of production. He has written muddled and poor plays along with the valid, some very muddled and very poor. But the great body of his work has a size and significance not remotely approached by any other American. In a broader sense, he is certainly in no remotest degree the mind that Shaw is — his is an emotional rather than an intellectual; he is not by far the poet that O'Casey is, for in O'Casey there is the true music of great wonder and beauty. But he has plumbed depths deeper than either; he is greatly the superior of both in dramaturgy; and he remains his nation's one important contribution to the art of the drama.

Before the presentation of *The Iceman Cometh*, it was exactly twelve years and nine months since O'Neill's last previous play, *Days Without End*, had seen production, and in the long intervening spell the theatre had had small news of him. Now and then came vague and contradictory reports that he was working on a cycle of eight or nine plays to be named by the general and somewhat turgid title, *A Tale Of Possessors Self-Dispossessed*; that he was very ill and no longer able to do any work; and that he had successively retired from the theatre to Sea Island, Georgia, and the Valley of the Moon in California, there to de-

vote the rest of his life to nursing his health, raising Dalmatian dogs, and laughing at most of current English dramatic criticism. But from the man himself there issued not so much as a whisper. What, really, was he up to?

It happens that we have been close friends for going on thirty years now, and that I am in a position to tell. That in the period of his absence he completed *The Iceman Cometh*, along with the subsequently to be produced *A Moon For The Misbegotten* and the still later to be produced *A Touch Of The Poet*, the public had been apprised. These three plays, however, were by no means all. During the twelve-odd years, he not only outlined in minute detail not eight or nine but all of eleven plays of the cycle referred to — the eleven were to be played, however, as eight with three combined into duplex units and presented, like *Strange Interlude*, on the same afternoons, evenings and nights — but further definitely completed seven of them, including the three double-length ones, and got pretty well into the eighth. In addition, he finished a separate and independent play of full length called *Long Day's Journey Into Night*, production of which he will not allow, for reasons which I may not specify, for many years. Nor, yet again, was that all. Besides *Long Day's Journey Into Night*, he also completed the first play of a much shorter and entirely different cycle of which no word has reached anyone. Its title, like that of the contemplated briefer series in its entirety, is *By Way Of Obit*. It runs for forty-five or so minutes and involves, very successfully I think, an imaginative technical departure from O'Neill's previous work. It contains but two characters and is laid in New York in approximately the same period as *The Iceman Cometh*.

All of which, one will agree, is not such bad going for a sick man.

The plays, *The Iceman Cometh* and *A Moon For The Misbegotten*, as well as the two last named, are distinct and wholly apart from the cycle of eleven plays. *A Touch Of The Poet*, however, was to be first play of that cycle in revision. As to the cycle itself, he gradually convinced himself, after he had got as far as he had with it, that his drama-

turgical plan was faulty. Without further ado, he destroyed two of the double-length, or four, of the plays he had written, preserving only *A Touch Of The Poet*, the third double-header (*More Stately Mansions*), and one scene in another to be called *The Calms Of Capricorn*. As for *A Touch Of The Poet*, it seems to him to be a unit in itself and may well, he thinks, stand apart and alone. When and if he will return to work on the cycle as he has newly planned it, he does not know. In his head at the moment is an exciting idea for another play which bears no relation to the cycle. It will probably be his next effort after he has finished the production supervision of the other two plays noted.

The reason he withheld the three plays for so long is that he has made up his mind never again to permit a play of his to be produced unless he can be present. His health was such that it did not allow him to come to New York earlier. There was also another reason. He did not believe that, while the war was on, the theatre was right for the plays, though none is in any way related to it. It was simply his feeling that wartime audiences would not be in a mood for such serious drama. His determination to be present at all future productions of his plays stems from his experience with his play *Dynamo*, which was shown in 1929. He was unable to come to New York for the casting and rehearsals of that one and learned all too late that the Theatre Guild had cast in the leading female role the fair young cute one, Claudette Colbert, famous for the symmetry of her legs and not wholly unaware of the fact. Throughout the play, the young lady sought to extend her fame by placing the two reasons therefor on display whenever one of the other characters seemed to her to be diverting the attention of the audience, and the play as a consequence ran a bad second to her extremities.

"Henceforth," O'Neill averred, "I myself cast not only actresses but legs!"

In addition to the projected plays specified, the playwright has made copious notes on at least three or four others. Some of these notes were begun even before he went

into retirement; others were made during that period. They include plans for, among the others, an heroic drama of ancient Chinese locale. This he has been mulling for fifteen years, though if he does it at all, which is doubtful, it would not be put into experimental preliminary writing until he finishes the one — with an American locale — alluded to as likely his next.

The long cycle, when and if he returns to it, will concern a single Irish-American family over a span of approximately one hundred and thirty years and will indicate broadly through its successive generations the changes in America and American life. Not the changes in the obvious theatrical sense, but the changes as they influence the members of the family. It will continue to be a study in character rather than a study in national progress. The latter will be held to a dramatic undertone. O'Neill's dissatisfaction with the work as far as it had gone proceeded from his conviction that it should deal with one family and not two, as it presently did. And also that, in the form he had written it, it began at the wrong point and overtold the story. Though he appreciated that he could rewrite what he had already done, he preferred to do away with much of it and to start afresh. The cycle, as he now envisages it, will begin with the French and Indian wars period and will present its first member of the family in the light of a deserter from the fighting forces.

O'Neill's attitude toward criticism of his work in particular and in general has not changed. However denunciatory and stinging it may be at times, he shows no indignation and maintains at least outwardly an appearance of smiling tolerance. Unlike a number of his playwriting contemporaries, he never makes public reply to it, though now and again to a close friend he will privately express his amusement over certain of its more capricious aspects.

An English critic recently, for example, had at O'Neill with the old, familiar contention that, though he may think of himself as a poet, he is far from one. In proof whereof, the critic delightedly quoted this speech by Marsden in *Strange Interlude*:

"We'll be married in the afternoon, decidedly. I've already picked out the church, Nina — a gray ivied chapel, full of restful shadow, symbolical of the peace we have found. The crimsons and purples in the windows will stain our faces with faded passion. It must be in the hour before sunset when the earth dreams in afterthoughts and mystic premonitions of life's beauty," etc.

"Didn't he realize," chuckled O'Neill, "that the attempt there certainly wasn't poetry, but poetic travesty? Marsden, as anyone must easily see, is a sentimental throwback, a kind of *Yellow Book* period reversion, and I was deliberately using that 'crimsons and purples in the windows,' 'staining our faces with faded passion' and so on stuff to indicate it."

The notion that O'Neill entertains a profound satisfaction with everything he has written and resents any opposite opinion — a notion that pops up in various treatises on his work — is nonsensical. I give you several instances out of my own personal critical experience. When his *The First Man* was produced, I wrote acidly of it, even indulging in some ridicule. Reading the criticism, O'Neill grinned. "You let it down too easy," he observed. "It's no good." When subsequently I wrote in the same vein about *Welded*, which he seemed to have faith in when he gave me the script to read, he allowed, "I know now I was 'way off; the play is all wrong; it's no good." When, on the other hand, I found certain things to my liking in *Gold*, he took me to task. "You're wrong. It's a bad play. I'm telling you." He further believes that *The Fountain* is even more defective than I found it to be, and that *Dynamo*, though granting its lapses, is considerably less so. Only in the case of *Days Without End*, which I could not critically stomach, has he vigorously opposed my opinion, and even in this case he allows that he now feels he must rewrite the play's ending for the definitive edition of his works. As originally conceived, this *Days Without End* was, as I have said before, laid back in the year 1857 or thereabout. Bringing it up to the 1930's seemed to me, among others, to render its single-standard sex idea somewhat archaic and shopworn.

O'Neill, however, was not to be persuaded. What he has persuaded himself, nevertheless, is that his hero's final gesture calls for alteration, though the alteration consists simply in reverting to the dramatic scheme as he first conceived it.

He is a stickler for casting and direction. As to the latter, his constant concern is any sentimentalization of his work. "Where sentiment exists," he says, "there is sufficient of it in the characters, and any directorial emphasis would throw it out of all proportion and make it objectionable." As to casting, he is generally opposed to so-called name actors. "They distract attention from the play to themselves," he argues. "My plays are not for stars but for simply good actors. Besides, you can never count on the idiosyncrasies of stars; they may not stick to a play and may so damage its chances on the road. I'm afraid of them, as I've had some experience with them. Also, they sometimes want you to change certain things in your play. Not for me!"

To return, finally, to *The Iceman Cometh*. I have already twice remarked that it may very roughly be described as a kind of American *The Lower Depths*. Like that play of Gorki's, though it in few other ways resembles it, it treats of a group of degenerate outcasts and the advent among them of a man with a philosophy of life new and disturbing to them. Its language is realistic, at times over-violently so; its cast of alcoholic down-and-outs includes gamblers, grafting cops, circus lot sharpers, whores, pimps, Anarchist riff-raff, military failures, college-educated wastrels, stool-pigeons, *et al.*; and it is written in four parts. It attests again to the fact, lost upon some of O'Neill's critics, that he is far from lacking a healthy sense of humor. Some of the comedy writing is irresistible. It also demonstrates again the most barbed appreciation of character known to any of his American playwriting contemporaries. And it embraces, among many other things, the most pitifully affecting picture of a woman — the unseen wife of the protagonist — that I, for one, have encountered in many years of playgoing.

Among the criticisms of the play is the argument that the characters "do not grow." That they do not grow is O'Neill's specific dramatic theme. Human beings sometimes change but change is not necessarily growth. Change is frequently impermanent and retrogressive rather than advancing, as O'Neill indicates. Another argument is that Hickey, the salesman of Death, in the end "explains himself with a text-book clarity that robs him of a truly dramatic role in the play, or a really human complexity." What of Nina in *The Sea Gull*? And a third condescendingly observes, "As for O'Neill's 'thesis,' it would seem to be that men can not live without illusions; hardly a new or very disputable idea." Hardly new, granted; but not very disputable? Come, come. What of the sufficient disputations on occasion of Ibsen, Strindberg, Zola, Hauptmann, Tolstoi, Wedekind, Shaw . . . ?



## MR. PEEBLES AND MR. HOOKER

OCTOBER 10, 1946

*A play by Edward E. Paramore, Jr., based on the novel of the same name by Charles G. Givens. Produced by Joseph M. Hyman for 4 performances in the Music Box.*

## PROGRAM

HANK	James Robertson	SHERIFF TODD BLAKELY	
BROTHER ALF LELAND	Paul Huber		Ralph Stantley
HATTIE	Juanita Hall	PETE	Arthur Foran
BROTHER WALLY LELAND		DEPUTY	Charles Thompson
	Tom Coley	MR. HATCHER CRAINE	
BUMP SORRELL	Arthur Hunnicutt		Neil McFee Skinner
ELLEN SORRELL	Dorothy Gilchrist	DR. PHIL JAMESON	Tom Morgan
CHAUFFEUR	Van Prince	JUDGE FAYETTE	Tom Hoier
MRS. HATCHER CRAINE		MR. PEEBLES	Howard Smith
	Randee Sanford	A STRANGER	Jeff Morrow
NATE CORBETT	Grover Burgess	WHIGSEY	Ken Renard
MR. HOOKER	Rhys Williams	JOE GREER	Dennis Bohan

**SYNOPSIS:** *Prologue. A fallen tree on a Tennessee hilltop overlooking a lake. Several years after World War II. Act I. Scene 1. The Leland house. Noon of a summer's day in 1939. Scene 2. Exterior of Mr. Hooker's shack. Two hours later. Act II. Scene 1. The Leland house. Noon, several days later. Scene 2. Interior of Mr. Hooker's shack. That evening. Act III. The Leland house. Midnight of the same night.*

Director: Martin Ritt.

**H**ERE IS ANOTHER of the Good versus Evil plays, of which since ancient times we have had an allopathic dose. The plays usually assume one of three forms. In the first, the Morality variations, the forces of Good and Evil are symbolized respectively as a blonde in a white dress named Virtue and as a brunet male in a black ensemble named either Vice or Wickedness. In the second, those of a poetic flavor, Good and Evil are cast in the respective persons of a medium-size, bandy-legged, milk-fed actor in a fair, curly wig whose persistently pure love for the heroine would. if

she were normal and not merely the routine cardboard figure, bore her to death before the second act was half over, and a tall, tubercular basso profundo with painted red ears and a couple of cowlicks who, if the management is not too economical, at several points in the evening is elaborately projected up onto the stage through a trapdoor illuminated by a crimson gelatine slide. In the third, or later day version, Good is represented by a character with some such ordinary modern name as Jones, or perhaps vaguely The Stranger, who with needful box-office caution is implied to be the Lord Almighty Himself, and Evil by another, similarly christened, who with no such necessary caution is heaved at the audience as Satan. I refer, of course, to the white drama. In the plays performed by Negroes there is no call for any such prudence in the picturing of the Deity, since audiences are disposed to accept as childishly innocent, artless and inoffensive anything Negroes may do under such circumstances.

Periodically in the contemporary theatre a playwright is thus overcome by the notion that there will be something quite pungent in taking one of the old Morality or Miracle plays, laying it in a drawing-room or somewhat less recherché milieu, and giving the characters names out of either Burke's *Peerage* or the telephone book. Mr. Paramore, the author of the play under consideration, is such a one. Employing a novel by Charles G. Givens as his groundwork, he has accordingly given us Good and Evil as Mr. Peebles and Mr. Hooker, has further risked the box-office by clearly identifying the former as God and risked nothing by identifying the latter as the Devil, has laid the scene of conflict in a strife-ridden Tennessee valley, and has contrived out of it all the usual anticipated poor play. His beginning, when he is content with the humors of the valley people, is entertaining enough. But when soon after he gets to the business of the evening and pits God against Devil his play becomes much the old stuff and bumps and rattles over the old tracks until it ends up a complete wreck.

A few of the episodes are interesting, such as the meeting after two thousand years of God and His Son, the latter

presented as a carpenter working in the valley, and the colloquy between God and the Devil in the latter's shanty with walls covered with *Esquire* girls. But aside from an amusing line or two and the idea of making Franklin D. Roosevelt (the time is 1939) the Devil's advocate, the body of the play is little more than the kind of literal charade concocted by school-teachers and their brighter pupils for the annual show on Parents' Day.

The performances, except for Paul Huber as a valley preacher and Arthur Hunnicut as a lewd, guzzling hill-billy, are of the mail-order catalogue species. And the direction is the kind which mistakes the stage's fourth wall for a loud speaker and which permits such stale bits of business, among others, as having a character bang his watch several times on a chair arm in order to set it working again.

## LADY WINDERMERE'S FAN. OCTOBER 14, 1946

*A revival of the play by Oscar Wilde, with incidental music by Leslie Bridgewater. Produced by Homer Curran in association with Russell Lewis and Howard Young for 227 performances in the Cort Theatre.*

## PROGRAM

LADY WINDERMERE		THE BISHOP	Peter Keyes
	Penelope Ward	MISS GRAHAM	Pamela Wright
PARKER	Thomas Louden	SIR JAMES ROYSTON	Jack Merivale
LORD DARLINGTON		LADY STUTFIELD	Anne Curson
	John Buckmaster	MR. DUMBY	Evan Thomas
DUCHESS OF BERWICK		MRS. COWPER-COWPER	
	Estelle Winwood		Leonore Elliott
LADY AGATHA CARLISLE		MR. HOPPER	Stanley Bell
	Sally Cooper	LADY PLYMDALE	Nan Hopkins
LORD WINDERMERE	Henry Daniell	SIR AUGUSTUS LORTON	Rex Evans
MR. RUFFORD	Paul Russell	MR. CECIL GRAHAM	Cecil Beaton
MISS RUFFORD	Jerri Savinnet	MRS. ERLYNNE	
LADY PAISLEY	Marguerite Gleason		Cornelia Otis Skinner
HON. PAULETTE SONNING		FIRST FOOTMAN	Guy Blake
	Tanagra Thayer	SECOND FOOTMAN	Richard Burns
LADY JEDBURGH		ROSALIE	Marjorie Wood
	Elizabeth Valentine		

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Morning-room of Lord Windermere's house in Carlton Terrace, London. Act II. Drawing-room in Lord Windermere's house. That evening. Act III. Lord Darlington's rooms. Directly following. Act IV. Same as Act II. The next morning.

The action of the play takes place within twenty-four hours, beginning on a Tuesday afternoon at 5:00 o'clock, and ending the next day at 1:30 p.m.

Director: Jack Minster.

I WISH THAT some appropriate person would investigate and report to me why the epigram is so generally viewed as the arch-criminal of literature. For a reason that I have never been able to make out, even the best and most intelligent epigram is looked down on as being frivolous, flip-pant, and all too easy. Though it may be quoted for years

on end and be as wise as it is witty, it is still regarded as a black sheep, unworthy of the respect of any mentality duly appreciative of such more copious literary forms as the *Congressional Record* and the cerebral ensembles of Walter B. Pitkin.

The revival of *Lady Windermere's Fan* brings up the matter anew. As Shaw observed in his review of another of Wilde's plays, "He has the property of making his critics dull. They laugh angrily at his epigrams, like a child who is coaxed into being amused in the very act of setting up a yell of rage and agony. They protest that the trick is obvious, and that such epigrams can be turned out by the score by anyone lightminded enough to condescend to such frivolity. As far as I can ascertain, I am the only person in London who cannot sit down and write an Oscar Wilde play at will. The fact that his plays, though apparently lucrative, remain unique under these circumstances says much for the self-denial of our scribes." That was written more than fifty years ago and it is even truer today than it was then. Nor is it familiarity with the epigrams that has bred contempt; the contempt would be there even were they fresh out of the bottle. Nor, furthermore, is the contempt longer confined to the critics, who usually are blamed for everything, often justly. The attitude is pretty general, like that toward the epigram's illegitimate cousin, the pun, which, however amusing, is similarly always good for a lofty and disgusted grunt.

Again, one speculates, why? Take at random a few Wilde samples:

"The truths of metaphysics are the truths of masks." It took Brioux a whole two and a half hour play (*La Foi*) to say much the same thing, and not half so sharply.

"The history of woman is the history of the worst form of tyranny the world has ever known: the tyranny of the weak over the strong. It is the only tyranny that lasts." The major part of the great Strindberg's dramatic canon is devoted to proving just that.

"Cynicism is merely the art of seeing things as they are instead of as they ought to be." Here, in little, is, among

other things, a critical appraisal of much of the classic Russian drama.

"The tragedy of old age is not that one is old but that one is young." Bataille consumed almost three hours to say the same thing in his admired *L'Homme à la Rose*.

"Ideals are dangerous things. Realities are better. They wound, but they are better." Yet Ibsen's *Brand*, Echegaray's *Folly Or Saintliness*, Hartleben's *Rose Monday*, and many other such dramas enunciating the idea at great length are highly esteemed.

Along with the epigram, Wilde's sincerity, or rather alleged lack of it, is another favorite disparagement on the part of his critics. When they speak of sincerity, they obviously speak of it according to their own personal standards, not Oscar's. Oscar, for all his occasional self-mockery, was perfectly sincere in following his own lights, peculiarly colored though they were. When at odd times he was guilty of what seemed to be insincerity, it was only obliquely to ridicule the dull sincerity of others. The man's whole life, save in one or two instances, was a testimonial to his sincerity, such as it was. But since wit is so often regarded by the witless as a mark of insincerity — as Shaw, whose sincerity has been raised to a point of obstreperousness, has also discovered to his amusement — Oscar has been tagged with the label.

In what he said, Wilde was for the most part absolutely honest, even though his honesty was difficult of appreciation by men philosophically and emotionally alien to his point of view. In what he did, except in a couple of theatrical instances, he was equally honest; and one of the exceptions concerns this *Lady Windermere's Fan*. In that case he dishonestly allowed himself to be influenced commercially in changing his play, though the meritorious critic, P. P. Howe, thinks otherwise and allows it was Wilde's utter disinterest in so-called "good" women that made it all a matter of indifference to him. This, however, seems to be straining a point for the defense. As originally written, the important scene read as follows: Windermere (*calling after Lady W.*) "Margaret! Margaret! (*A pause*) My God! What

shall I do? I dare not tell her who this woman really is. The shame would kill her. . . ." To make things safer at the box-office, the line was altered to "My God! What shall I do? I dare not tell her that this woman is — her *Mother!*" The change was a concession to cautiously cheap, popular playwriting, and Wilde should have been ashamed of himself. (The present revival properly goes back to the line as first written.) His critics are further in the habit of waxing sarcastic over the fabricated nature of his plots. But, as Howe points out, Wilde is at one with Mr. Bayes of *The Rehearsal* in saying, "What the devil is a plot good for but to bring in fine things?" The plot of this *Lady Windermere's Fan*, for just one example, is little more than Bertha M. Clay dressed in silk. But what matter? The plots of some of the best plays in dramatic history are even worse.

It was not plot that interested Wilde, or that should interest any critic not given to an admiration of detective fiction and other such juvenile diversions. It was style, and at style, as at decoration, he excelled. "In all the unimportant matters," he declared without paradox, "sincerity, not style, is the essential. In all important matters, style, not sincerity, is the essential." And his style in his dramatic time was as unrivalled as it is in ours. His sense of word and phrase and sentence is almost perfect. "Words," he said, "have not merely music as sweet as that of viol and lute, color as rich and vivid as any that makes lovely for us the canvas of the Venetian or the Spaniard, and plastic form no less sure and certain than that which reveals itself in marble or in bronze, but thought and passion and spirituality are theirs also — are theirs, indeed, alone."

In short, go listen to *Lady Windermere*. Creak sometimes in its rococo tracks as it may, it is still a wonderful play of escape — escape from the flat, humdrum, untutored, and inanimate writing of so many of the plays we encounter today.

Cecil Beaton's settings, costumes and lighting for the revival are admirable. They capture perfectly both the exhibit's period and splendid artificiality. As *Lady Windermere's Fan*

mere, Penelope Ward is not only a British personification of all the Gibson girls with which the Charles Dana of that name decorated an American era but plays the role as well as ever it has been played within my long recollection. Cornelia Otis Skinner's Mrs. Erlynne, which comes into its own in the last act, suffers on the way from a tendency to overemotionalize the part and to accompany the overemotionalization with an obbligate of eye blinking that rivals in virtuosity the combined lens activities in Barnegat Bay. Estelle Winwood looks and acts the Duchess of Berwick as if the Duchess were the late Mrs. Leslie Carter, which, considering the role, is not altogether a fault. As Windermere, Henry Daniell misses the necessary polite finish; it seems at times, what with his jowled grimness, that he would be much more at home in Angel Street than in Carlton Terrace. John Buckmaster is a valuable Lord Darlington; Cecil Beaton a musical comedy Cecil Graham who retails the succession of Wilde epigrams as if they were a lyric by Ira Gershwin or Cole Porter; Rex Evans a first-rate Lord Augustus Lorton; and Evan Thomas and Stanley Bell respectively an appropriate Dumbly and Hopper.

In the aggregate, a salubrious revival of a witty souvenir of the dramatic machine-age.



## THE DUCHESS OF MALFI. OCTOBER 15, 1946

*The tragedy by John Webster, adapted by W. H. Auden, with incidental music by Benjamin Britten. Produced by Paul Czinner for 38 performances in the Barrymore Theatre.*

### PROGRAM

FERDINAND, DUKE OF CALABRIA	Donald Eccles	CARIOLA	Patricia Calvert
THE CARDINAL	John Carradine	JULIA	Sonia Sorel
GIOVANNA, DUCHESS OF MALFI	Elisabeth Bergner	OLD LADY	Michelette Burani
ANTONIO BOLOGNA	Whitfield Connor	LADIES ATTENDING ON THE DUCHESS	{ Diana Kemble Beth Holland
DELIO	Richard Newton	CHAPLAIN TO THE CARDINAL	William Layton
DANIEL DE BOSOLA	Canada Lee	SECRETARY TO THE CARDINAL	Frederic Downs
OFFICERS	{ Ben Morse Michael Bey	ANTONIO'S SON	Maurice Cavell
ATTENDING ON THE DUCHESS	{ Laurence Ryle Robin Morse	MADMEN:	
CASTRUCHIO	Guy Spaull	PRIEST (Singer)	Walter Peterson
SILVIO	Michael Ellis	LAWYER	Robert Pike
RODERIGO	Rupert Pole	ASTROLOGER	Frederic Downs
GRISOLAN	Jack Cook	DOCTOR	Guy Spaull
		DOCTOR	Robert Pike

**SYNOPSIS:** *The play is given in three parts. The action takes place in Italy, early in the sixteenth century at Malfi, Rome, Ancona, and elsewhere.*

Director: George Rylands.

**T**HOUGH IT HAS BEEN STAGED by several amateur organizations, this marks the first local professional production of the early seventeenth century's prime necrological tragedy. Its score of nine killed is a record of sorts, since beaten, so far as I can recall, only in more modern years by the blood and thunder Wild West melodramas, which were held not to give their customers their money's worth unless biting the dust were at least thirty or forty Indians, impersonated by half a dozen supers who crawled unobserved off

the stage and reappeared for a second, third and fourth de-  
cease. Slaughter on the still grand, if somewhat lesser, scale,  
was, however, close to Webster's fancy, as all period pun-  
dits know, and in his directly antecedent *The White Devil*,  
which bears a surface resemblance to *The Duchess* and is  
the better play, he got himself into this real sporting form  
with an experimental mere six murders. From the horror  
and terror of such carnage it was his intent to evoke pity —  
and evoke it he apparently did in his time — but it is to be  
feared that what is evoked in these modern times is less  
commiseration than rude laughter.

The reason is plain. Like *Hamlet* without Hamlet, *The  
Duchess Of Malfi*, as *The White Devil* for all its relative  
virtues before it, is like Bacon without Shakespeare. The  
power to lift his materials above sheer melodrama was sim-  
ply not in Webster; aside from a few winging passages the  
writing is often merely turgid where it aspires to be rich  
crimson and purple, and the dramaturgy sketchy where it  
hopes to be elliptically driving. That Lamb and Swin-  
burne felt he touched the sublime surely implies on the  
part of those worthies a very peculiar sense of sublimity.

The gory tale of the ill-starred Giovanna, derived, we  
are told, from the history of the granddaughter of King  
Ferdinand of Naples who in the early fourteenth century  
fled from the vengeance of her brothers with the steward of  
her household whom she had secretly married, is wrought  
by Webster with an intensity which is confined to his ac-  
tors and which is not imparted to his auditors. Where  
flight of true poetic expression might bear it across the  
footlights, the carrier is frequently crippled blank verse,  
and where dramatic sensitiveness and imagination might  
assist, there is but a lame rhythmical prose. As an historical  
curio, the play has some interest, but in every other way it  
amounts to excessively dull theatre.

This dulness, gradually increasing to stupor, is empha-  
sized in the present production staged by George Rylands,  
who performed the same disservice for the previous year's  
revival in London, and is doubly emphasized by the acting  
company. Doubtless believing to make the play more ac-

ceptable to modern audiences, the director has softened the elements of horror to the point of complete ineffectiveness, and has thus rid it of one of its most important and vital ingredients. He has further so conversationalized the stage action, even at its most violent moments, that the whole gives the impression of a performance by the late Readers' Theatre. The acting, as noted, contributes additionally to the débâcle. Elisabeth Bergner, in the name role, comports herself in the earlier portions of the play like a stock company ingénue's understudy and in the later like the ingénue herself, and all with a beery German accent that results in such scarcely Elizabethan readings as, for instance, "Doo you remembair de Dook?" I observe that one of my more distinguished colleagues has praised the actress for her acquisition at length of some restraint and, also, for her subtle indication of growth in the role. As for the restraint, it seems to me that Miss Bergner has chosen the wrong time for it and that, if ever her former lack of it was at least partly to be desired, this was the play and occasion. Her Duchess is so exaggeratedly and inappropriately quiescent that one feels she has mistaken the play for some little thing by Maeterlinck. As for the growth and development of character, so far as I can see it has infinitely less to do with any authentic acting than with wearing a long red wig in the early acts, taking it off and appearing in her short, natural hair in the middle section, and sprinkling talcum powder on the latter in the final section when age, agony and despair are supposed to overtake her.

The supporting company ranges from the incompetent to the ridiculous. And the box-office dodge of smearing pink paint on the Negro actor, Canada Lee, and passing him off for a white, is childish nonsense, since all the pink paint in the world can not alter what are unmistakably Negroid features.

The Britten incidental music, meagre as it is, is the evening's one intelligent theatrical feature.

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 LOCO. OCTOBER 16, 1946

*A comedy by Dale Eunson and Katherine Albert. Produced by Jed Harris for 37 performances in the Biltmore Theatre.*

## PROGRAM

NAOMI BREWSTER	<i>Beverly Bayne</i>	GINGER	<i>Marlo Dwyer</i>
ALMA BREWSTER	<i>Helen Murdoch</i>	MATRON	<i>Darin Jennings</i>
McINTYRE	<i>Barry Kelley</i>	EBEN	<i>Parker Fennelly</i>
WALDO BREWSTER	<i>Jay Fassett</i>	PAMELA BREWSTER	<i>Elaine Stritch</i>
DAVID SKINNER	<i>Morgan Wallace</i>	NICKY MARTINEZ	<i>Si Vario</i>
LOCO DEMPSEY	<i>Jean Parker</i>	MISS WHITE	<i>Ethel Remy</i>

**SYNOPSIS:** *The action takes place within a period of ten days in February of this year. Act I. Scene 1. The Brewster library. Scene 2. The Golden Bantam. Scene 3. Powder-room of the Golden Bantam. Scene 4. Brewster's bedroom. Scene 5. Brewster's hunting lodge in Maine. Act II. Scene 1. The lodge. Scene 2. The library. Scene 3. The lodge. Scene 4. The library. Scene 5. Brewster's office.*

Director: *Jed Harris.*

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THE AUTHORS, operators in Hollywood, have written what they evidently regard as a sophisticated, up-to-the-minute comedy by changing the ailing child who conciliated family differences in the drama of yesterday into an ailing Conover model. The husband and father, who in the old plays went off on a spree with the bottle or the actress in the cast who wore a more soigné dress than his wife, here goes off with the model aforesaid, no frump either. The latter comes down with a bad case of the measles when they reach their Maine rendezvous and the old boy, slightly to his disappointment, as the truly sophisticated will appreciate, finds himself playing nurse instead of house. His new and unexpected role, however, gradually mellows his former nasty nature and causes him to see the light. He concludes that he has been something of a louse in his treatment of his family and resolves to chart a different course, the resolution getting up full steam when he

learns, as in the turkeys of the 1890's, that his daughter, whom he has cruelly disinherited, is about to make him a grandfather.

Now that you have partly recovered your composure, it may be suggested that the trouble with most such ambitiously sophisticated authors is that their sophistication runs to sex in proportion to the velocity with which their plays run from adroit writing. Give the same plot, junk though it is, to a superior comedy writer and grace of language crossed with wit would make it not only digestible but even highly entertaining. Yet in the hands of such as have here executed it, it offers little more generally than the tune of rattled dry bones. The evening is relieved at widely spaced intervals by an amusing line, but even this rare humor is derivative. It stems, as in the scene between the blonde model and her brunette model friend, from Anita Loos' *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*; in the character of the former model, frequently from Garson Kanin's *Born Yesterday*; in the wry observations of the down-East handyman, from plays ranging from Lottie Blair Parker's to George M. Cohan's; etc.

Jean Parker, described in the program as "vacationing from the Hollywood coal pits where she was developing a B-complex from being saved by B-heroes from B-cliffs in B-pictures" and making her first appearance on the Broadway stage, was surprisingly apt in the model role and, save for occasional exaggeration, delivered a genuinely droll performance. Jay Fasset was the drily competent husband on the loose, and Morgan Wallace a first-rate foil as his philandering Horatio. The rest were nothing.

Donald Oenslager's settings were ingeniously designed and attractive, except for the husband's library with its shelves of books, numbering probably two hundred, bound largely in identical green and all apparently by the same author and from the same publisher. Jed Harris' direction, where it involved Miss Parker and the Messrs. Fasset and Wallace, was satisfactory, but much less so where the other actors were concerned.

## LYSISTRATA. OCTOBER 17, 1946

*A revival of the satirical comedy by Aristophanes in the adaptation by Gilbert Seldes. Produced by Max Jelin and James Light for 4 performances in the Belasco Theatre.*

### PROGRAM

LEADER OF OLD WOMEN'S CHORUS	Pearl Gaines	PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE	Rex Ingram
LYSISTRATA	Etta Moten	SPARTAN ENVOY	Maurice Ellis
KALONIKA	Fredi Washington	KINESIAS	Emmett Babe Wallace
MYRRHINA	Mildred Smith	TRYGEUS	John De Battle
LAMPITO	Mercedes Gilbert	NIKIAS	Larry Williams
LEADER OF OLD MEN'S CHORUS		POLYDORUS	Sydney Poitier
	Leigh Whipper	LYKON	Emory S. Richardson

**SYNOPSIS:** Act I. *Daybreak on the Acropolis, Athens, 411 B.C. in the twenty-first year of the war between Athens and Sparta.* Act II. *The same. Late afternoon, five days later.*

Director: James Light.

THE REVIVAL PROMPTS several thoughts. The first is speculation on the failure of our later day propaganda playwrights to assimilate the play's practical lesson and to realize that humor and satire may accomplish ends that solemnity most often does not. Aristophanes, as everyone knows, wrote two other pleas for peace in the *Acharnæ* and the *Peace*, both similarly waggish and both — though not played in our time — almost as effective as this *Lysistrata*, which is, or should be, as alive today as it originally was and which is periodically revived around the world. Moreover, as propaganda it remains, at least theatrically, a lot more reasonable than most of the rueful and indignant modern jobs.

The second concerns August Wilhelm Schlegel, widely venerated as a critic of considerable parts. Observed Schlegel in his *Lectures On Dramatic Art and Literature*: "It (*Lysistrata*) is in such bad repute that we must mention it

lightly and rapidly, just as we would tread over hot embers." Though he subsequently allowed that, despite its "mad indecencies," the purpose of the play was on the whole quite innocent, it was this moral consciousness, detectable in much of his work, that kept him a critic of the second rank. He affected an ethical liberality and often affected it rather convincingly, but he was at bottom a moral coward, and moral cowardice and forthright criticism are scarcely handmaidens.

The third is the current to-do in Negrophile circles over the "limited opportunities" which the present theatre affords members of the colored race, the to-do duly accompanied by some very fancy groans and lamentations. The so-called limited opportunities are largely imaginary. The Negro today enjoys opportunities in the theatre relatively every bit as plentiful as his white brothers and sisters; indeed, enjoys them proportionately in even greater degree. Since there are probably at least fifty whites seeking roles for every Negro, the latter's average in achieving them is notably the better. The Negro, furthermore, this production of *Lysistrata* attests, is not and has not been bound by the particular nature of drama, as his volunteer mourners insist. Such plays as *The Green Pastures* and *Anna Lucasta* naturally aside, he has been afforded an opportunity in a wide variety of such classics and semi-classics as *Othello*, *The Tempest*, *The Duchess Of Malfi*, *et al.*, in the plays of all sorts of modern writers like O'Neill, Rice, Green, Saroyan, *et al.*, in the musical exhibits of Gilbert and Sullivan, Bizet, Gershwin, etc., and in all kinds of plays in which the roles in other days would have been confined strictly to whites or to whites in blackface.

In the last half dozen seasons previous to this, Negroes have appeared in no less than fifty-nine different Broadway plays and in no less than thirty-eight different Broadway musicals. And, off Broadway, they have appeared in their own theatres, both experimental and stock, and now and then to white acclaim, in everything from Biblical drama and problem plays to such Broadway farce-come-

dies as *Three Is A Family* and *Arsenic And Old Lace*. In the antecedent season alone and exclusive of stage dance troupes like Katherine Dunham's, stage choirs like Hall Johnson's, extras and musical show choruses, totaling something like two or three hundred, all of ninety-six Negroes were to be seen in the Broadway productions. In the same season, only nine English-speaking actors and actresses from Germany, Austria and Hungary could land jobs in such productions, only five English-speaking French players, and but thirty-three Jews, American or otherwise. So let the professional mourners for the Negro's hypothetical plight confound themselves with the hard statistics.

One has heard objection in some quarters to casting *Lystrata* with Negroes. It is difficult, in view of the acceptance of previous castings, to understand any such attitude. The casting may seem freakish, but it is scarcely more so than casting the Greek characters, as in the production shown in 1930 on Broadway, with a mongrel troupe that included, among others, an English drawing-room comedy actress, a Cuban, a Hungarian, an American actress with a thick Dixie drawl, an East Side Jewess, a German actress, an Italian, a former *Follies* girl, a French farce actor, an Irishman, and a society cutie from Boston.

The point for immediate critical consideration, however, is that the present Negro company is even less equal to the play than the white one was. The second point is that the Seldes adaptation, which was also employed by the earlier company, has apparently been dirtied up either by the producers or Mr. Seldes himself in the erroneous hope of bringing money into the box-office. The third point is that the adaptation as here purveyed and the nature of the staging which has been contributed it combine to make of the Greek original something that Aristophanes would scarcely have recognized. The fourth point is that the result converts the classic comedy into a bastard combination of Minsky, Mae West, and *By Jupiter!* which robs it of its chance to prove the argument ventured in the first para-



graph of this review. The fifth and final point, if any more points are needed, which is doubtful, is that burlesquing satire, which has been the process here, is productive of neither burlesque nor satire and murderous of both.

As a cheerier note, I report that the cast included a lady rejoicing in the name of Laphawn Gumbs.

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## NAUGHTY-NAUGHT. OCTOBER 19, 1946

*A revival of the travesty melodrama by John Antwerp, with music by Ted Fetter and Richard Lewine. Produced by Paul Killian in association with Oliver Rea for 3 weeks' performances in the Old Knickerbocker Music Hall.*

### PROGRAM

P. DE QUINCY DEVEREUX		CLAIRE GRANVILLE	Ottillie Kruger
	John Cromwell	JIM PAWLING	Marshall Jamison
SPUNKY	Teddy Hart	JOE	Roy Wolvin
FRANK PLOVER	Leonard Hicks	TOM	Len Smith, Jr.
JACK GRANVILLE	Kenneth Forbes	BARTENDER	George Spelvin
STUB	Shepard Curelop	CATHLEEN	Virginia Barbour
FRED	King Taylor	PUGSY	L. A. Nicoletti

Director: Ted Fetter.

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THIS BURLESQUE of an old-time college melodrama to an accompaniment of beer and pretzels was first tendered back in 1937 when such doings seemed still to come under the heading of novelty. Whimsically described as "a musical melodrama of virtue triumphant, or dirty work under Yale's elms," it suffered my presence, and vice versa, at that time. On this occasion, I benevolently stayed at home. The idea of being again inflicted with the spectacle of a lot of theoretical adults going through the old mechanics of hissing the villain, cheering the hero, and dodging the female trapeze performer in the olio was, I felt, too much for what remains of my constitution, even if reinforced with alcohol. Nor was my disinclination materially lessened by the prospect of having to look again at the race between two pasteboard crews, the lady juggler on a unicycle, the trained dog, and some of my revered colleagues defiantly pretending to be amused by the general monkeyshines. Remaining at home and drinking my own beer, I entertained myself instead by reading several such perfectly serious old college dramas as Owen Davis' *At Yale* and Rida Johnson Young's *Brown Of Harvard*, which were a lot funnier.

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 MADE IN HEAVEN. OCTOBER 24, 1946

*A comedy by Hagar Wilde. Produced by John Golden for 91 performances in the Henry Miller Theatre.*

## PROGRAM

NANCY TENNANT	<i>Katharine Bard</i>	HARRY HUNT	<i>Lawrence Fletcher</i>
MARIAN HUNT	<i>Sarah Burton</i>	DOROTHY	<i>Marrian Walters</i>
LASZLO VERTES	<i>Louis Borel</i>	MISS CROWDER	<i>Jane Middleton</i>
PHILIP DUNLAP	<i>Tony Bickley</i>	HANK	<i>Maurice Manson</i>
ELSA MEREDITH	<i>Carmen Matthews</i>	MAN AT BAR	<i>Willard L. Thompson</i>
ZACHARY MEREDITH	<i>Donald Cook</i>	JUNE	<i>Ann Thomas</i>

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Scene 1. *Living-room of the Zachary Merediths, within easy commuting distance of New York. 11:30 Sunday evening.* Scene 2. *The same, 5 o'clock the following afternoon.* Act II. Scene 1. *Zachary's office in New York, a half hour later.* Scene 2. *The bar in the Hotel Revere, a few minutes later.* Scene 3. *A room in the Hotel Revere, immediately afterward.* Act III. *The Merediths' living-room, noon of the next day.*

Director: *Martin Manulis.*

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MISS WILDE, unlike the authors of *Loco*, cannot introduce the catalytic sick child into her play because her married couple has not been blessed, as the word is, with offspring, but nevertheless introduces again the young female in whom the forlorn husband seeks consolation, as the word is. In the end, the wife, who is also forlorn, again finds that her mate has been innocent of any wrongdoing, as the word is, takes him back to her bosom, and they live happily ever afterward, as the witticism is. The rusty plot is sprinkled with the usual squabbles between a pair of other married couples, the routine young demi-virgin who ventilates the customary derisions on sexual morality, the stereotyped sardonic female given to drink, the Palais Royal hotel bedroom inopportunately invaded at intervals by at least half the cast, the ancient comedy involving the mixture of an outlandish alcoholic drink, the hasty packing of luggage and the city of Philadelphia, and the species

of wit resident in such quips as "My sinus trouble is back," with the snapper, "Has it been away long?" The writing is the kind that hopefully fishes in the depths of character with wisecracks, and that mistakes mere vulgarity for robust humor. Now and again an amusing line turns up, much like a postman on a supplementary round with a special delivery letter; and a scene in a bar between two unhappy and disgruntled husbands (with the usual music in the background) turns out, as such bar scenes often have a way of doing, to be the most acceptable in an otherwise hardly acceptable series. But the exhibit on the whole indicates once again that plays which may seem very amusing when tried out in the rural summer theatres seldom justify themselves critically when brought into the city. This one was shown during the late summer in the little Westport, Connecticut, theatre under the title, *It's A Man's World!*, and apparently so fascinated Mr. Golden in its bucolic surroundings that he undertook its metropolitan ciceronage. It is not difficult, however, to understand either Mr. Golden's or almost anyone else's fascination under such summer circumstances.

Unlike the autumn, winter and spring urban theatre which profits from people's interest, the little rural summer theatre profits from their boredom. It is promoted on the sound theory that city folk living in the country for the season, to say nothing of the city folk who merely visit them, will jump at any chance to forget their isolation for a while and to get as near to the good old city feeling again as is possible. Life in the country during the summer may be tolerable and even pleasant during the daytime. But, as anyone who has undergone it appreciates, when night falls it can get pretty lonely and dreary, at least after one has experienced it for some time. That is, unless you so wear yourself out with exercise of one form or another that you are happy to tumble into bed right after dinner or are of the species able to bewitch yourself with the radio, crossword puzzles, and the conversation of your mother-in-law.

To anyone not so gifted in the technique of physical, intellectual or spiritual mayhem, however, the country after

dark — and particularly and most especially when it rains — may be said to be something less than a combination of the Athenæum Club and the Folies Bergère. Dinner over, the evening looms ahead like a gloomy, damp, and endless cloud. There is, of course, recourse to the bottle, but the trouble in that direction is that for some traditional and idiotic reason, offensive yet prevailing in the case of even men of cerebral parts, drinking seems to be something to be abandoned when they temporarily forsake the city and betake themselves to the bucolic fresh air. And there is also, of course, amour — if you can find it. But otherwise if one isn't the sort who relishes gin rummy or some other such mind and posterior callousing game, colloquies on the likelihood of the most recent neighborhood murderer's being a marijuana addict, or going out into the kitchen and pinching the colored maid (which obviously is unthinkable in the case of any married householder, if not weekend guest) there is little more to occupy one than a prisoner in solitary.

It is here that the summer theatre comes in. Having exhausted the relief from the monotony of rural life in the Grade B, C and D movies in the adjacent village film houses, the country dweller grasps the little drama parlors to his bosom as a token of what he has left behind him in the city. They may frequently be a poor token; the plays they offer may be all too familiar to him; but, whatever they are, they afford him for at least one night a week contact with the civilized world outside. He may have already seen such of the summer's omnipresent fare as *Angel Street*, *Blithe Spirit*, *Night Must Fall*, *Springtime For Henry*, and *Kiss And Tell* to his stomach's fill, but they or anything else like them, however stale, do not discourage him. They are better than hanging around the house, idly thumbing his wife's two months' old copy of a fashion magazine, listening for the sixtieth time to the phonograph's "Doin' What Comes Natchu'llly," and being driven half crazy by the eternal crickets. The little theatre down the way may be uncomfortable, and the mosquitoes may assault him when he moseys out in the intermissions, and the

acting may be the kind that induces wincing. But your city exile knows that he will see lights and people and the buzz of life again, and maybe hear a little of the old chitchat, and perhaps have a drink, not solo but in bar company, before, during, and after the show. And that surely is something, however little, to relieve the humdrum of nights crawling slowly to bedtime out where the blues begin.

Contrast all this with conditions in the city which the exile, as he only too dismally realizes, has voluntarily put behind him. The very theatre which he warmly welcomes in the country always suffers a serious decline during the summer months not because many of its customers leave the city but rather because the many more who do not can find a lot of things much more entertaining. The urban theatre in the summer has to rely for what trade it enjoys largely on visiting out-of-towners who can't get away from their dull hinterland homes during the autumn, winter and spring and to whom it represents what the little country theatres do to the city deserter.

The city man who is wise enough to remain in the city does not on the other hand need the theatre to divert him, any more than he really needs the country to give him the alleged necessary change. He can get all the country and change he needs and wants in town, and with a great deal more comfort, satisfaction, and amusement. Even if he is a vain dog and wishes to wobble the ladies with a sun-tan, it is his under the nearest barbershop sun-lamp, and without the bucolic obligato of gnats, blue-headed flies, and athlete's foot. If he yearns for the theoretical cool rural air, it is his in the nearest cozy bar or restaurant, and without the wafted perfumes of ragweed, cow dung, and chicken coops. If it is trees he craves, there are the parks or, better still, the artificial palms on roof gardens and in cafés and night clubs which are gratifyingly free from wet leaves that dribble on his head and caterpillars that drop down his collar and birds that polkadot his wardrobe. And that's only part of it.

There are two sides to every story, including Thoreau's. In town, man may wander out-of-doors unharassed by in-

sects, weltered roads that imminently threaten turned ankles, and pitch-black pathways full of rocks that stumble him onto his nose. In town, the night is not empty but challenging, and over it hovers the selfsame moon and stars that embroider the countryside heavens. It wouldn't, in short, come to think of it, be such a bad social idea if, instead of inviting weekend guests to the country, the invited guests tickled their hosts no end by inviting them to weekend in the city.

To return to the rural summer theatres, it is their paradoxical misfortune and chief handicap that they have to operate in the country. To that fact is attributable most of their horrors. As Tallulah Bankhead, who had been performing in them, has remarked, it is hard for an actress to keep her mind on her lines when she is simultaneously called upon to dodge flies and bugs and bats. It also isn't easy for an audience to pay the proper attention to a play with giant moths assailing its ears, stray spiders crawling up its neck, and bobby-sox ushers loudly chewing the fat. Nor is the world of illusion noticeably helped by the honking of late arriving and early departing automobiles, by the screened exit doors apparently designed to be slammed open and shut just as Mady Christians or Edward Everett Horton is going into the big scene, or by the ever present yokel urchins who hang around outside and raise their voices in "Hey Ba-Ba-Re-Bop" just as Francis Lederer is caught in the act of strangling his wife by Bramwell Fletcher. A sparrow that has settled in the flies and falls on Jane Cowl's head doesn't much assist the mood of *Candida*. The mooing of cows in an adjoining pasture may be said not materially to help the picture of *Lady Precious Stream*. And I doubt if a couple of empty soft drink bottles rolling down the aisle do anything to heighten the tension of Diana Barrymore's vicissitudes in *Rebecca*.

There are, however, always trains to the city.

Of the performances in the imported Wilde play, Lawrence Fletcher's as the husband who disrelishes his wife with a consuming nausea seemed to me far the best. Donald Cook's I could not fairly estimate, since what share the di-

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rector played in over-accenting the serious side of the character there was no way of telling. As the distraught wife, Carmen Matthews made so many noses and gulped so much saliva that one expected her any moment to step to the footlights and sing "You Are My Heart Alone," which might have relieved matters all around. Katharine Bard, as the philosophical demi-virgin, was considerably more impressive pictorially than histrionically, and the rest were cut out of the common cloth. The direction at least kept the actors moving, which was more than the script did.



# THE PLAYBOY OF THE WESTERN WORLD

## OCTOBER 26, 1946

*A revival of the comedy by J. M. Synge. Produced by Theatre Incorporated for 81 performances in the Booth Theatre.*

### PROGRAM

MARGARET FLAHERTY, called  
 PEGEEN MIKE *Eithne Dunne*  
 SHAWN KEOGH *Dennis King, Jr.*  
 MICHAEL JAMES FLAHERTY  
                   *J. M. Kerrigan*  
 PHILLY CULLEN *Barry Macollum*  
 JIMMY FARRELL *J. C. Nugent*  
 CHRISTOPHER MAHON  
                   *Burgess Meredith*  
 WIDOW QUIN *Mildred Natwick*

SUSAN BRADY *Mary Diveny*  
 HONOR BLAKE *Sheila Keddy*  
 NELLY *Julie Harris*  
 SARA TANSEY *Maureen Stapleton*  
 OLD MAHON *Fred Johnson*  
 VILLAGERS, *Robin Humphrey,*  
                   *Mary Lou Taylor, Mary T.*  
                   *Walker, Paul Anderson, James*  
                   *L. O'Neil, Ford Rainey.*

SYNOPSIS: Act I. A dark autumn evening. Act II. Morning the next day. Act III. Later the same day.

The Scene. *Flaherty's public house near a village on the wild coast of County Mayo, Ireland.*

Director: *Guthrie McClintic.*

THE REVIVAL INTRODUCES into the theatre again a work of true dramatic stature: lyric imagination in full satiric flower and embellished with the ribbons of some of the most beautifully cadenced speech the modern stage has known. "It's little you'll think," Christy tells Pegeen who has ridiculed his way of loving, "if my love's a poacher's, or an earl's itself, when you'll feel my two hands stretched around you, and I squeezing kisses on your puckered lips, till I'd feel a kind of pity for the Lord God is all ages sitting lonesome in his golden chair." Or again Christy on his father's alcoholic antics, in reply to Pegeen's prayer to a merciful Providence, "It's that you'd say surely if you seen him and he after drinking for weeks, rising up in the red dawn, or before it maybe, and going out into the yard as

naked as an ash tree in the moon of May, and shying clods against the visage of the stars till he'd put the fear of death into the banbhes and the screeching sows." Or, yet again, Christy as to Pegeen, "I will not then, for there's torment in the splendor of her like, and she's a girl any moon of midnight would take pride to meet, facing southwards on the heaths of Keel."

Observing that, in the writing of the play, he had used one or two words only that he had not heard among the country people of Ireland or spoken in his own nursery before he could read, and that, in countries where the imagination of the people and the language they use are rich and living, it is possible for a writer to be rich and copious in his words and at the same time to give the reality, the root of all poetry, in comprehensive form, Synge further concluded, "On the stage one must have reality, and one must have joy; and that is why the intellectual modern drama has failed, and people have grown sick of the false joy of the musical comedy that has been given them in place of the rich joy found only in what is superb and wild in reality."

In this play, one of his two masterpieces (the other, of course, is *Riders To The Sea*), as in relatively lesser degree in his several others, the rich joy he speaks of has been realized. Not the rich joy in language and speech alone, but the rich joy, too, in a thematic fancy that tosses its hat saucily over the windmill, in a satiric delight, and in the smiling thinking of a real poet. In the lad who is fêted as a hero when word gets 'round that he has murdered his old father, who is abandoned when the word is found to be false, and who moves to make the word true in order to re-instate himself in the worship and the glory, are all the droll symbols not only of the Irish temperament but of temperament much the world around. For, as his author knew, there is often a reality in what seems merely fanciful greater than in what seems closer to truth.

In *The Iceman Cometh*, for example, O'Neill's theme in part is the familiar one that man will not live without illusion, and it has been accepted, almost without excep-

tion, by his critics and audiences as an admitted fact. Yet while it is obviously true to a certain degree, it is not true in its entirety. There hence would have been a greater reality, and perhaps a greater relative originality, in the fancifully treated theme that man lives and lives happiest in disillusion. It is reality not dream that keeps man happy. In childhood, it is not the illusion of Santa Claus that matters so much as the reality of the gifts he brings. In old age, it is not the illusions of youth that reflectively bring peace and contentment, but the amusement achieved in recollecting their foolishness. It is not the pink mists of love that gladden and satisfy; it is the realistic acts of love. *Et sic de ceteris*. Illusion retards man; disillusion challenges the best in him. There is more reality in a fanciful play like this of Synge's than in any number of the superficially factual ones. In even the errors of the fanciful there is a call to mature reflection that is not always heard in the mathematics of what passes for truth. "Give me your good fruitful error any time, full of seeds, bursting with its own corrections," wrote Pareto, "and you can keep your sterile truth for yourself." Fancy gives us the human reality of a play like Synge's. What is too commonly accepted in the theatre as reality gives us only the greasepaint reality of the *Truckline Cafés*.

Impossible as it may seem, however, the present revival both in direction and most of the acting rids the fine play of all its lyricism, all its great comic gusto, and all its normal effect. Not only has Mr. McClintic missed entirely the intrinsic ironic nature of the comedy and staged it much as if it were half naturalistic problem drama, half literal melodrama, but he has followed the fatuous later day principle that there is something deplorable in reading verse as verse, or, here, rhythmical prose as rhythmical prose, and that it will all seem much more natural and impressive if it is read with a studious contempt for its melodic line. He has also directed Burgess Meredith's Christy as if the character were a vague, mystical combination of Ibsen's Oswald and the idiot boy in the murder melodrama, *Hand In Glove*, and has accordingly given the whole the air of a

*The Colleen Bawn* company rehearsing for *The Duchess Of Malfi*. Some authentic Irish actors like J. M. Kerrigan, Barry Macollum and Fred Johnson are lost in the shuffle, and, while Eithne Dunne, imported from the Abbey and the Gate for the role of Pegeen, might possibly suffice under other and more fortunate circumstances, her acting method in this instance haplessly suggests a trombone manipulated with a sore thumb.

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 DERRYOWEN. OCTOBER 28, 1946

*A comedy by Michael O'Hara. Produced by the Blackfriars' Guild for 24 performances in the Blackfriars' Theatre.*

## PROGRAM

MICHAEL JAMES O'CALLAGHAN	DAN KILCOYNE	F. X. Donovan
Seamus Maloney	DONAGH MCNAMARA	
MOIRA O'CALLAGHAN		Dennis Harrison
Andree Wallace	CONSTABLE MCGOVERN	
TIMOTHY ALOYSIUS KEOUGH		Burke McHugh
Gerald Buckley	ANN TRAVIS	Mabel McCallum

*SYNOPSIS: The action of the play takes place in the tap room of a small seaside inn on the west coast of Ireland. Act I. Late afternoon of a day in May, 1944. Act II. Scene 1. Noon the next day. Scene 2. The same evening. Act III. Later that night.*

Director: Dennis Gurney.

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THE THEATRE sometimes has an accidental way of imposing unwelcome risks on its playwrights. One such victim might be this Mr. O'Hara. Even were his Irish comedy a hundred times better than it is (a consummation devoutly, etc.) it would still suffer from being produced immediately following that of Synge's. Though a critic have a mind as open as the Gypsum Cave, he can not under such circumstances, struggle with himself as he may, quash the stubborn impulse of comparison. With the memory of the one play still all too vivid, his powers of resistance helplessly weaken and, though he remember well one of the basic principles of his art and craft, the battle between probity and recollection turns out to be a losing one. It is unjust, but this is an unjust world.

Thus, any comparison, however involuntary, of a comedy like Mr. O'Hara's with one like *The Playboy* leaves it in a very lamentable predicament. Taking criticism by the ear and compelling it to behave itself and forget comparison nevertheless here, alas, does no good. Mr. O'Hara's re-

mains still in the very lamentable predicament. His talent, if any, is as yet in the amateur stage; his dramaturgy is sub-amateur; and his play is about as imitative and as poor as they can come.

Our Celtic friend's effort is a muddled business which, to an accompaniment of discussions on Irish neutrality during World War II, hopes to show the difficulties in mutual understanding that arise between two couples, the one Irish, the other American, and the manner in which they ultimately may be resolved. In the execution, there is not an idea that is not commonplace, or a line of dialogue with any least life, or a situation that is not out of the old stage trunk.

The acting with minor exception was in key with the whole.

## PRESENT LAUGHTER. OCTOBER 29, 1946

*A comedy by Noel Coward. Produced by John C. Wilson for 159 performances in the Plymouth Theatre.*

## PROGRAM

DAPHNE STILLINGTON	<i>Jan Sterling</i>	ROLAND MAULE	<i>Cris Alexander</i>
MISS ERIKSON	<i>Grace Mills</i>	MORRIS DIXON	<i>Gordon Mills</i>
FRED	<i>Aidan Turner</i>	HUGO LYPPIATT	<i>Robin Craven</i>
MONICA REED	<i>Evelyn Varden</i>	JOANNA LYPPIATT	<i>Marta Linden</i>
GARRY ESSENDINE	<i>Clifton Webb</i>	LADY SALTBURN	<i>Leonore Harris</i>
LIZ ESSENDINE	<i>Doris Dalton</i>		

SYNOPSIS: *The action passes in Garry Essendine's studio in London. Time. The present. Act I. Morning. Act II. Scene 1. Evening. Three days later. Scene 2. The next morning. Act III. Evening. A week later.*

Director: John C. Wilson.

MR. COWARD's latest contribution to the admiration of his admirers, like most of his others, adheres to his established pattern, which consists in blowing soap bubbles through an upturned nose. That it is quite a trick, no one will deny, particularly no one who is likely to mistake an upturned nose for an upturned mind and a studiously acquired attitude for a natural superior air.

The enjoyment of a trick, however, is not necessarily confined to those who can't see through it. One may look at the materialization of a large bucket of wine, for instance, a half dozen times and, though aware that the thing is done *via* the conjurer's amplitudinous robe, still permit one's self a childish pleasure. Such pleasure may also be derived from Mr. Coward's prestidigitations, even though what he materializes is often more like a small glass of water. He is gifted with the patter cleverly to distract one's attention from his *modus operandi*; he shrewdly sees to it that his robe is of chi-chi design and so on its own attractive to the dear ladies in the house; and he seldom, to his credit,

pretends that his hocus-pocus is anything but hocus-pocus. He leaves that to those of his critics who, in their artlessly rapt concentration on his patter, often fail to see the sleight behind his trick and persuade themselves that it is not a trick at all but rather something dramatically supernatural.

It is these among Mr. Coward's fans who detect in his beguiling chit-chat, which is of the transparent obliquity of Fred Keating's in connection with the vanishing canary, a magical wit, and in his plays not the mere small glass of water but the bucket of wine, vintage. It is these who in their almost volitional deception convince themselves that what is essentially a legerdemain matinée show, and sometimes diverting enough as such, is dialogue almost as trenchant as Wilde's and characterization nigh as droll as Sheridan's. It is these, also, who see a play's style in the cut of its actors' evening clothes and dressing gowns and a play's literary color in terms of its valet, butler, or footmen. It is not these, on the other hand, who are all too critically conscious of the fact that Mr. Coward's performances are plays which inevitably abjure body simply because their author has none and which may more or less accurately be described as combining the best features of a society column with the worst features of W. S. Maugham, the whole composed by an imitator of Sacha Guitry.

This most recent and poorest demonstration of Mr. Coward's virtuosity in playwriting that conceals the absence of a play, deals with a London stage idol and the three women in his life: the routine stage-struck young girl, the predatory female, and the wife who, though not sharing his bed and board, nevertheless continues to be interested in his welfare. The dealing is conducted entirely in what is intended as "smart" sex talk and, when the latter is exhausted, duly winds up with the wife again in her actor mate's arms. Some of the talk is amusing in the superficially sophisticated way familiar to Mr. Coward's audiences; some of it is of the equally familiar species that palms a pansy and prestos it into the semblance of a



johnny-jump-up; and more of it has recourse to dressing up feminine views in masculine clothes by way of giving them some fancied slight weight.

That Mr. Coward has the ability to keep a celluloid ball in the air for two hours is made much of by his admirers. In that ability they see something that amounts to sheer genius. But, while I surely am not one to argue that it isn't another good trick, I can't see that critically it is any more than that and that it differs very little from prolonging Herrmann's or Kellar's ten-minute levitation act far beyond its intrinsic entertainment worth. Perhaps I am a bit peculiar when it comes to the theatre and drama — the evidence in support is enough to choke a horse — but I still prefer the kind of playwriting that abjures much ado about nothing in favor of no ado about something.

All this, of course, is not for a moment to say that Mr. Coward isn't an exceptionally sagacious theatrical artificer. It is simply to say what any criticism devoted to matters above mere theatrical artifice should say, and in the saying probably not influence in the slightest the larger number of theatregoers. To that ample number, Mr. Coward and his plays are like so many Lunts; it matters not at all what they are about so long as they are about it; they are in themselves, whatever they do, sufficient. But to the considerably lesser number there may occur a critical paraphrase of that celebrated passage in Mr. Coward's own *Middle East Diary* which runs, "I talked to some tough men from Texas and Arizona; they were magnificent specimens and in great heart, but I was less impressed by some mournful little Brooklyn boys lying there in tears amidst the alien corn with nothing worse than a bullet wound in the leg or a fractured arm."

The paraphrase:

We have been talked to by some tough plays from England and America; they were magnificent specimens and in great heart, but we are less impressed by these little Piccadilly homozygotes strutting here in impish snickers amidst even all the local corn with nothing better than a silk sock on the leg or a fractured morality.

Clifton Webb, who plays the typical Coward role in the present exhibit, handles his assignment fruitfully; his support is fairly satisfactory; Donald Oenslager's setting is attractive; and Mr. Wilson's direction, while too leisurely paced, is save in one important particular serviceable. That one particular is his oversight in not having the women play the men's roles and the men the women's. It would have made for a very much more logical and convincing evening.

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## HAPPY BIRTHDAY. OCTOBER 31, 1946

*A comedy by Anita Loos, with incidental music by Robert Russell Bennett. Produced by Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II for the rest of the season's performances in the Broadhurst Theatre.*

### PROGRAM

GAIL	Margaret Irving	THE JUDGE	Ralph Theadore
GLORIOUS	Musa Williams	PAUL	Louis Jean Heydt
DAD MALONE	Thomas Heaphy	POLICEMAN	Philip Dakin
GABE	Charles Gordon	TOT	Enid Markey
BELLA	Florence Sundstrom	EMMA	Grace Valentine
HERMAN	Jack Diamond	MANUEL	Philip Gordon
MYRTLE	Jacqueline Paige	MARGOT	Eleanor Boleyn
JUNE	Jean Bellows	BERT	James Livingston
ADDIE	Helen Hayes	MR. BEMIS	Robert Burton
MAUDE	Lorraine Miller	MR. NANINO	Harry Kingston
DON	Dort Clark		

**SYNOPSIS:** *The action takes place in the Jersey Mecca Cocktail Bar in Newark, N. J. Act I. Late afternoon. Act II. Immediately afterwards.*

Director: Joshua Logan.

**T**HERE IS NOTHING LIKE that innocence in our theatre audiences which views as something quite remarkable the spectacle of a dramatic actress unexpectedly doing something she has never done before. That she may do it only indifferently well or even very badly does not in the least count. The fact that she does it at all is accepted as a token of extraordinary versatility, much as if Jane Austen had suddenly broken out as a ventriloquist or Beethoven as a tap dancer. It is no new development. It has been that way now for half a century or more. Let an actress surprise her audience by her ability to play chopsticks without any assistance, as before, from an off-stage piano, and the applause will make that following Maurice Evans' entire performance of Hamlet sound in comparison like the

cracking of a rheumatic's knuckles. Let her surprise it no less with her ability to dance a few steps that would not get her a job even in the chorus of *Sammy's Bowery Follies* and it will be agape in an admiration the like of which Loie Fuller herself never shared, even from the boys in a Western mining camp, all of them in their cups and on the exalted verge of delirium tremens. Ada Rehan, after years of Shakespeare, warbled a few notes in Paul Kester's play, *Sweet Nell Of Old Drury*, and had the audience cheering its fool head off. Nothing Mrs. Leslie Carter ever did in any other direction really made half the impression of her bit of Y.W.C.A. gymnastics in *The Heart Of Maryland*. One still remembers the yells of startled delight when Ethel Barrymore executed a ten-second sashay in *A Royal Fandango*, or, much more recently, when the incomparable Laurette Taylor did the same thing in *The Glass Menagerie*.

The latest of the girls to have fun, and with much the same result, is Helen Hayes. The fact that she can actually sing a little song and dance a little dance, though she does neither at all well, is apparently sufficient to induce in her audiences an enthusiasm for her wonderfully increased histrionic resources. Unless my memory is bad, she also served up such a dance titbit some years ago in *The Good Fairy*, which evoked a similar fanaticism. But now that most people have forgotten it and she has done it all over again, and for extra miraculous measure has also gone in for a little yodeling, the awe of the simpleheads probably would not be equalled even were the Old Vic company to show up in *Loco*.

'That Miss Hayes must be foaming to pay a big income tax is further indicated in the fact that she has seen to it that Miss Loos' play provides her with a drunk act. Aside from the introduction of that song and dance business, there is little that enchants an audience quite so much as the spectacle of an actress known to be the soul of propriety off stage becoming intoxicated on. This also has been operating, and with the same box-office prosperity, almost as long as the song and dance hokum. It may be remem-

bered, for example, that Charles Frohman resorted to it in the early days of Maude Adams' career—the play was Clyde Fitch's *The Masked Ball*—to initiate his favorite star's popularity. In short, when all else fails work in either the song and dance or the drunk racket. Miss Hayes, as noted, has not only shrewdly worked all of it in holus-bolus but, to make certain nobody walks out, has arranged that her drunk act consumes fully three-fourths of the evening. If, therefore, the play were not to succeed, which under the circumstances would be unthinkable, it would be the fault of the other fourth, when she just acts normally and with the usual high Hayes proficiency.

As for the play itself, though the actress' numerous fans surely are not concerned about any such minor detail, the best that may be said for it is that it is not much good. A kind of Alice In Wonder Bar, if you recall the latter play, it dramatizes, in terms far beneath the humorous level of its author's merry *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* and *But They Marry Brunettes*, an excursion into the vagaries of alcoholic liquor by a faded but romantic New Jersey spinster librarian. Aside from a few fresh, comical lines—notably one condemning the present municipal administration for having ruined the great charm of Newark—the play intermittently suggests at least seven or eight other and much better plays and betrays its literary origin when Miss Hayes at one point surveys her surroundings and ecstatically cries out, "This isn't just a dream; it's Hollywood!" The author's attempt at fantasy, furthermore, goes curiously amiss. It is her apparent belief, for just one example, that money suddenly takes on great importance to an inebriate and that a five dollar bill looks to him ten times its ordinary size. The opposite, as all who have ever engaged the bottle know, is rather the fact. The importance of money diminishes as alcoholic effect increases. To one under the influence, money is as nothing and the material for grandiose scattering. Drink makes spenders even of misers.

The Mielziner setting and lighting are first-rate; the Logan direction has its ups and downs; and the more bolstering performances, apart from the star's, are those of Enid Markey and Grace Valentine as two elderly trollops and of Lorraine Miller as a younger one.

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 PARK AVENUE. NOVEMBER 4, 1946

*A musical comedy by George S. Kaufman and Nunnally Johnson, with lyrics by Ira Gershwin and music by Arthur Schwartz. Produced by Max Gordon for 72 performances in the Shubert Theatre.*

## PROGRAM

CARLTON	<i>Byron Russell</i>	RICHARD NELSON	
NED SCOTT	<i>Ray McDonald</i>		<i>Raymond Walburn</i>
MADGE BENNETT	<i>Martha Stewart</i>	MRS. BETTY NELSON	<i>Mary Wickes</i>
OGDEN BENNETT	<i>Arthur Margetson</i>	TED WOODS	<i>Harold Mattox</i>
MRS. SYBIL BENNETT		MRS. LAURA WOODS	<i>Dorothy Bird</i>
	<i>Leonora Corbett</i>	JAMES MEREDITH	<i>William Skipper</i>
CHARLES CROWELL		MRS. BEVERLY MEREDITH	
	<i>Robert Chisholm</i>		<i>Joan Mann</i>
MRS. ELSA CROWELL		MR. MEACHEM	<i>David Wayne</i>
	<i>Marthe Errolle</i>	FREDDIE COLEMAN	<i>Wilson Smith</i>
REGGIE FOX	<i>Charles Purcell</i>	CAROLE BENSWANGER	
MRS. MYRA FOX	<i>Ruth Matteson</i>		<i>Virginia Gordon</i>

SYNOPSIS: *The home of Mrs. Ogden Bennett. Long Island. Act I. The Terrace. Lunch time. Act II. The drawing-room. Dinner time.*  
 Director: *George S. Kaufman.*

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EARLY IN THE SUMMER, in answer to a reporter's question as to what this, his and Johnson's forthcoming musical comedy, would be like, Mr. Kaufman replied, "No dreams, no ballets, and no statues that come to life." It surely sounded like a good show.

It is no news that we all by now have been pretty well fed up not only with such items but with a quota of others which few musicals have failed to dish out to us. It was therefore to be hoped that the charitable Mr. Kaufman would see fit, in the interests of the public weal, to exclude also them from his show, which would then be an even better one. If, we meditated, he would not have his heroine, who up until that time was a nice, sweet girl, come to the footlights around ten-thirty and persuade us

that she was nevertheless red-blooded and a good fellow by singing a song that started out innocently and ended up on a smutty sex note, we would send him as a mark of our gratitude a set of framed photographs of Gertrude Niesen, Mary Martin, and Ethel Merman. And if he would omit not only the ballets as promised but also the numbers that pretend they are not ballets by keeping the dancers off their toes, and that are even worse than the ballets, we would further enrich his collection with chromos of Agnes de Mille, Felicia Sorel, and Helen Tamaris.

There were some other things that we hoped he would not do, and they were not only coloratura sopranos and leading men in dress coats whose tails extend three feet below the knees. Among them was the scene at the end of the first act in which the lovers are parted. Maybe that was too much to expect, but we promised ourselves to enrich his wall triply with a full set of photographs of the authors of all the musical comedies from 1898 to 1946 inclusive if but for once he would leave them together at that time and be a lot more true to life by separating them instead at the last act curtain. And if, having done that, he would then turn up his nose at the customary pal of the heroine, the tall, scrawny, wisecracking comédienne with the heart of brass who opens her mouth like a Dorothy Parker but talks like an Ilka Chase, we would present him for his other wall with pictures of Jean Dixon, Paula Laurence, Carol Goodner, and Luella Gear, in color.

Since his show was to be called *Park Avenue*, we further prayed that our suspicion that he would have a ballroom scene in it would be unwarranted. If he insisted upon having it, we only hoped that he would open his show with it instead of closing it, as has been the general custom. We have been waiting to see a ballroom scene open a show instead of closing it for fifty years now, and while we would be perfectly willing and happy to go to our graves without ever seeing one again, we do not think we would mind it quite so much if it beat the clock by a couple of hours and got itself over and done with at the start. And while we were indulging in blissful dreams, why couldn't we, we



thought, have a lover hero in one of these shows with a smart society setting who for a change didn't look as if he were dying of hypoalimentation but who had some healthy meat on him? The idea that ladies of social station never love any man who weighs over one hundred and thirty pounds, particularly when there is some music in the background, has been responsible for years of fashionable musical show romance which has suggested much less the honest amorous passion of a woman for a man than that of one whose libido has been psychopathically inflamed by the spectacle of a diet.

We surely, we said to ourselves, also would not complain if Mr. Kaufman did not have his Park Avenue society ladies drink the tea that is presumed to be the invariable beverage of such ladies on the stage and if he did not arbitrarily picture their husbands as half-wits with more copious bank accounts than glands. The usual musical comedy society folk seem to be descendants of Harrigan and Hart, which factually, of course, would not be such a bad idea. But people are not always so lucky in this world and if we must have society people on the stage let us, we said, have them bear some slight resemblance to what they really are, which is good for a laugh, and not show them to us as four out of every five musical show writers and Toots Shor imagine them.

A box of cigars with Jackie Gleason's picture on the bands would also go to Mr. Kaufman if he were to eliminate the song that almost every music show deems it necessary for the comedian to sing. Any show, even if it is a stinker, seems pretty good to us if around ten o'clock the comedian is not made to croak a lyric to some such effect as that he picked a lemon in the garden of love where only peaches grow or that his wife would be a wonderful woman if only she didn't bite her toe-nails in bed. With the cigars would be dispatched by uniformed special messenger the morning after the opening a handsome gold pocket lighter with the profile of Hamtree Harrington engraved on it if Mr. Kaufman further decided against making the Park Avenue heroine's butler a Negro and having

him enter the Louis Quatorze drawing-room in overalls and sing, in a deep bass voice, how he feels like an eagle soaring above since Abe Lincoln set his people free. The gold lighter, in fact, would be accompanied for extra measure with a gold matchbox, in case it didn't work and Mr. Kaufman didn't regard the award as sufficient.

If, having gratified us so profoundly in all these other directions, our friend would additionally throw any tap dancers who showed up for jobs right out of the window and close the window so they could not get back in again, we would nominate him as the man who had contributed most to the glory of the theatre in the 1946-47 season. And then, if he topped everything by cutting out the drop curtain showing a railroad station with an arrow sign reading "To Newport" and having the Broadway chorus girls saunter aristocratically across the stage to fill in time while the stagehands were shifting the scenery, we would give him an oil painting of George Marion, Jr., provided only he didn't close his show with the whole company yelling its head off in the conventional belief that the sight of sixty such boilermakers would send an audience out happier than if the stage were occupied solely by a Bobby Clark or a Vera-Allen.

The months passed and here at last is the show. As Mr. Kaufman promised, it does not contain the statue that comes to life, but there has been a little cheating in the case of the dream and the ballet items. It may be not exactly a dream, but the vision that the soubrette has when she sings "Goodbye To All That," in which the chorus girls and dancers act out her memories, comes uncomfortably close to being one. And, while it may not be exactly a ballet, the pantomimic dance number detailing the happenings in a Reno courtroom comes even more uncomfortably close to being one, and a mighty bad one. Also denying our prayers and injunctions, the show includes the heroine's ten-thirty naughty ditty, a second number that tries to avoid the ballet label by keeping the dancers off their toes, the parting of the lovers at the end of the first act, the wisecracking comédienne with the heart of brass, the

wealthy, half-wit husbands, the comedian's ten o'clock song, the tap dancer, and the company yelling its head off in the finale.

And that is not all. The old chorus of bridesmaids carrying the customary bouquets opens the show. A pair of male dancers who have no slightest connection with the proceedings come on at intervals and lift whoever else happens to be dancing at the time into the air. There are the usual jokes about Hollywood, Reno, *Tobacco Road*, and the "third childhood" of elderly men who go out with young girls. The butler, on making an indiscreet remark, embarrassedly claps his hand to his mouth and tiptoes elaborately off the stage. There is the lyric containing the names of various widely advertised products, and the one about radio quiz shows which award a large sum of money to anyone who can give the names of his parents. The tall, rangy comédienne shows up at one point wearing comical pantalettes. The leading lady exits in one fancy dress and appears shortly thereafter in another and even fancier, repeating the costume change every twenty minutes. And the haughty hostess condescendingly observes of one of the guests, "Remember, he is from out of town!"

The plot, a variation of the numerous adapted German and French farce-comedies popular in the local theatre in the early 1900's, has to do with the frequent changing of marital mates among society folk. The setting is on Long Island. Judging from the looks and comportment of the characters, to say nothing of the habit of the males in wearing winter dinner jackets in the summer, it must be Astoria. Some of the dialogue is comical in a vaudeville way, but the constant hitting of the single divorce note makes for ultimate torpor. The music is strictly penny-whistle; the lyrics in major part are the routine the-dew-was-on-the-rose, there's-nothing-like-marriage-for-people, and don't-be-a-woman-if-you-can sort; Donald Oenslager's two settings look as if they had been designed for an old Fred Whitney production of *Shamus O'Brien*; so, too. Tina Leser's costumes; and the whole produces the kind

of review that is always dismissed as "merely destructive" by any such claptrap's admirers.

Out of the mess emerge only Leonora Corbett, who isn't much of a singer, who can't dance, but who reads lines drolly; Arthur Margetson, always a welcome polite comedian; and Raymond Walburn, who makes a great deal out of a bit in which he vainly tries to recall a remarkable piece of philosophical advice which, he insists, has colored his whole life.

## HENRY VIII. NOVEMBER 6, 1946

*A revival of the Shakespeare-Fletcher play, with incidental music by Lehman Engel. Produced by the American Repertory Theatre for 39 performances in the International Theatre.*

## PROGRAM

THE PROLOGUE	<i>Philip Bourneuf</i>	SIR HARRY GUILDFORD	
DUKE OF BUCKINGHAM			<i>Arthur Keegan</i>
	<i>Richard Waring</i>	ANN BULLEN	<i>June Duprez</i>
DUKE OF NORFOLK		FIRST CHRONICLER	<i>Philip Bourneuf</i>
	<i>Raymond Greenleaf</i>	SECOND CHRONICLER	
LORD ABERGAVENNY			<i>Eugene Stuckmann</i>
	<i>Robert Rawlings</i>	SIR NICHOLAS VAUX	<i>Donald Keyes</i>
CARDINAL WOLSEY		CARDINAL CAMPEIUS	<i>John Straub</i>
	<i>Walter Hampden</i>	AN OLD LADY	<i>Margaret Webster</i>
CROMWELL	<i>Eli Wallach</i>	GRIFFITH	<i>Donald Keyes</i>
SIR THOMAS LOVELL	<i>Emery Battis</i>	LADY IN WAITING TO KATHERINE	
SERGEANT OF THE GUARD			<i>Ruth Neal</i>
	<i>William Windom</i>	GARTER KING OF ARMS	
HENRY VIII	<i>Victor Jory</i>		<i>Angus Cairns</i>
DUKE OF SUFFOLK		EARL OF SURREY	<i>William Windom</i>
	<i>Efrem Zimbalist, Jr.</i>	ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY	
KATHERINE OF ARAGON			<i>Theodore Tenley</i>
	<i>Eva Le Gallienne</i>	PATIENCE	<i>Marion Evensen</i>
SURVEYOR	<i>Angus Cairns</i>	A MESSENGER	<i>Robert Rawlings</i>
LORD CHAMBERLAIN	<i>Ernest Truex</i>	CAPUCIUS	<i>Eugene Stuckmann</i>
LORD SANDS	<i>John Becher</i>	DUCHESS OF NORFOLK	
			<i>Mary Alice Moore</i>

*Ladies of the Court, Crowd, Ladies to Katherine. Lords, Bishops, Monks, Guards, Servants, Heralds, Pages, Executioner, Sergeant at Arms*

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Scene 1. *Outside the Council Room.* Scene 2. *The Council Room at Whitehall Palace.* Scene 3. *A street.* Scene 4. *Wolsey's Palace at York House.* Scene 5. *Outside the tower.* Scene 6. *The King's apartments.* Scene 7. *The Hall at Blackfriars.* Act II. Scene 1. *The Queen's apartments.* Scene 2. *The King's apartments.* Scene 3. *Westminster Abbey.* Scene 4. *A room in Kimbolton Abbey.* Scene 5. *Ante-room in the palace.* Scene 6. *Outside the palace at Greenwich.*

Time and place: London. 1521 to 1533.

Director: *Margaret Webster.*

ONE CAN NOT, obviously, judge the worth of a repertory company from its initial production, since it is in the position of any other company acting a single play. If it does it badly, the outlook for its repertory competence is of course not too rosy. If it does it well, it may nonetheless not necessarily do other succeeding plays as ably. Best to appraise it, it is therefore advisable to wait until the returns are more fully in.

The newly founded American Repertory Theatre, with Cheryl Crawford as managing director, opened its program with the Shakespeare-Fletcher historical chronicle treating of Buckingham's execution, Henry's dismissal of Katherine as queen in favor of Anne Boleyn, the fall of the once powerful Cardinal Wolsey, and Katherine's death. It is not an easy play to do, as various earlier companies have duly found out. Its peculiar collaboration resulted in much uneven writing; its dramaturgy, such as it is, is quite as uneven; its pageantry horns into what little flow it has; its roles range from the histrionically first-rate to the acutely fourth-rate; and it amounts in sum to poor Shakespeare corrupted by poorer Fletcher and, possibly, even poorer Massinger. Besides, it contains, along with its occasional small pearls some of the pastiest and even some of the shoddiest and most catchpenny writing known to classical dramatic literature. Margaret Webster, serving its present entrepreneurs, was most wise in cutting out a good slice of it and in reducing the original five acts and sixteen scenes to two acts and thirteen scenes. The result was an improved, if still very shaky, play and an evening, at least dramatically, interesting to resolute students of classical curiosæ.

The acting, however, was another and very different matter. Though it was plain that Miss Webster had done her intelligent best—aside from the badly overdone interpolated business of the Holinshead chroniclers—to direct the play and players into a comparative acceptability, she was balked in a number of cases by the latter's se-

vere limitations. As Henry, for example, Victory Jory was triumphant in makeup but clearly untrained by the nature of his past activities for any such role. He accordingly played it very largely as a mere recitational exercise punctuated alternately with corporeal wobbles and stern stances, giving to the interpretation (grossly to misuse the term) the air of an actor uncomfortably fighting his person into an even more uncomfortable historical costume. Eva Le Gallienne's Katherine was pictorially striking, but otherwise suggested less Henry's queen than an ambitious and hard-working ingénue handicapped by an emotional equipment that stops and is dried up between the tongue and the trachea. As Anne, Henry's succeeding love, June Duprez enjoyed the necessary looks but did not prove that a long moving picture career is the best preparation for the dramatic stage. And though Walter Hampden on the other hand did moderately well by the Wolsey role, he oddly enough in view of his classical experience lent it little of the stature which has been imparted to it by his predecessors, ham or otherwise. Direction, however, was here conceivably to blame.

Nor was the rest of the company, save to a degree only Richard Waring as Buckingham, perceptibly better than routine stock. David Ffolkes' settings and costumes were imaginative and handsome, and Lehman Engel's incidental music, apart from the conventional over-use of trumpets, was fairly satisfactory. But this first production in most other particulars missed, and badly. What the company would seem to have needed were fewer run-of-the-mill actors, a number of them pretty colorless and stale, and at least one or two, whatever the bulk of their talents, of the magnetic personalities of such Old Vic figures as Olivier and Richardson. And, harking back to the Old Vic company and some of its exotic locutions, let us not fail to note such of this American company's as "Cordinal," "subjects," "histry," "Emprer," "allegence," "malus," "circumstince," "conferse," etc.

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BAL NEGRE. NOVEMBER 7, 1946

*A "musical revue of Caribbean exotica" devised by Katherine Dunham. Produced by Nelson L. Gross and Daniel Melnick for 55 performances in the Belasco Theatre.*

## CAST

Katherine Dunham, Lenwood Morris, Eartha Kitt, Jean Leon Destine, Mariam Burton, Lucille Ellis, Othella Strozier, Candido Vicenty, Lawaune Ingram, Rosalie King, James Alexander, Mary Lewis, Gordon Simpson, Dolores Harper, Jesse Hawkins, LaRosa Estrada, Vanoye Aikens, Gloria Mitchell, Richardena Jackson, Wilbert Bradley, Ronnie Aul, Eddy Clay, Byron Cuttler, Julio Mendez, Ricardo Morrison.

Director: Katherine Dunham.

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THIS IS SIMPLY a new title for much that appeared in Miss Dunham's *Tropical Revue* of two seasons ago adorned with much scenery that was used in her *Carib Song* of last season. The program of dances is by now familiar enough. A mixture of West Indian and American Negro primitive folk rhythms, with the emphasis on sensuality, they are individually of a visual hypnosis but, when repeated over a two hour period, as here, inclined to suffer from monotony. Included again in the present exhibit are the ritual numbers from previous shows, commented on, not without some qualms, in earlier volumes of this year-book series.

Miss Dunham remains a valuable and attractive figure on the American dance stage, but hints that an urge to what is known as showmanship is beginning to influence, and not for the good, the quality of her original performances. It would, of course, be foolish to say that sexuality is not part and parcel of many of the native dances which she and her company duplicate. But it is less foolish to say that lifting it from the implicit to the explicit, and often lifting it with a derrick, is less part and parcel of authentic choreographic art than of palpable box-office politics.



## WHAT EVERY WOMAN KNOWS

NOVEMBER 8, 1946

*A revival of the comedy by James M. Barrie. Produced by the American Repertory Theatre for 21 performances in the International Theatre.*

## PROGRAM

ALICK WYLIE	Ernest Truex	LADY SYBIL TENTERDEN
JAMES WYLIE	Arthur Keegan	Mary Alice Moore
DAVID WYLIE	Philip Bourneuf	A MAID Cavada Humphrey
MAGGIE WYLIE	June Duprez	CHARLES VENABLES
JOHN SHAND	Richard Waring	Walter Hampden
COMTESSE DE LA BRIÈRE		A BUTLER Efrem Zimbalist, Jr.
	Eva Le Gallienne	

ELECTORS OF GLASGOW AND MEMBERS OF THE COWCADDENS: John Becher, Angus Cairns, Cavada Humphrey, Ann Jackson, Donald Keyes, Robert Rawlings, John Straub, Eugene Stuckmann, Theodore Tenley, Eli Wallach, William Windom, Ed Woodhead, Efrem Zimbalist, Jr.

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Scene 1. *The Wylie house in the village of the Pans, Scotland. Time: The early nineteen hundreds.* Scene 2. *A barber shop used as Shand's committee rooms, Glasgow. Six years later.* Act II. Scene 1. *The Shand house in London. Two years later.* Scene 2. *The same. A few weeks later.* Scene 3. *The Comtesse's cottage in Surrey. Three weeks later.*

Director: Margaret Webster.

THIS SECOND PRODUCTION of the American Repertory Theatre unfortunately did little to increase enthusiasm for the company. Aside from speculation on the wisdom of including the play, which is simply a pleasant if over-sentimentalized minor comedy, in any sound repertory program, the performance again was no better than suburban stock and ridiculously below the level of both the earlier Adams and Hayes exhibits. I appreciate that the latter were of the relatively distant past, but surely we have the right to expect that the many intervening years

bring with them, if maybe not improvement, at least an equal or fairly approximate quality. Yet — to begin at the beginning — not only was Miss Duprez's Maggie Wylie nowhere even remotely within hailing distance of the Maggies of her two predecessors, which will probably come as an overwhelming surprise to no one, but, viewing her performance quite independently of any consideration of the others', I am still afraid that she disclosed no perceptible symptoms of competence. It pains me to have to write such an opinion of a young actress, and a good-looking one to boot, but this job, alas, is full of unwelcome twinges. Poor Miss Duprez was cruelly imposed upon by the well-meaning company powers. To have given her any such important and challenging role without proper preparation was merciless. (I shall have a word on these mis-handled novices anon.)

The other members of the troupe contributed little to the happiness of the occasion. Miss Le Gallienne played the Comtesse de la Brière in such exaggerated musical comedy style that one expected Jan Kiepura to make an entrance at any moment. Costumed like the late Adele Ritchie on one of that lady's most violent sartorial sprees, she converted those scenes in which she figured into sections of a Harry B. Smith libretto concocted for the combined Gallic monkeyshines of Fritz Scheff, Anna Held, and Fleurette De Mar, and all to the accompaniment of one of those standard, fixed and determinedly arch stage smiles which are supposedly indicative of wholesale bonhomie, physical attraction, and *joie de vivre*. In view of the lethargy of the evening's other elements, however, I say criticism be damned and that, absurd as the performance was, under the circumstances it was still something of a relief.

Richard Waring interpreted John Shand's dourness by setting his features into the pattern of Clifford Odets' and further acted for most part the way Odets often writes. Mr. Hampden's Charles Venables was largely spats, morning coat and wing collar, but it was nevertheless agreeable to watch an actor who at least knows the fundamentals of

his craft and who, whatever the quality of his immediate performances, has a substantial professional air about him. The rest of the company were to be dismissed and told to go home.

Miss Webster's direction was, furthermore, quite ordinary. The actors were made minstrel-show-like to face the audience most of the time; preserved were such antique bits of business as causing an actor upon removing his shoes elaborately to wriggle his toes; and, in the case of Miss Duprez, hands clasped crosswise to bosom were, after all these years, still allowed to depict humility and hands clasped crosswise to waistline the growth of some self-confidence.

While awaiting the next production, I, unlike some of my colleagues, could see no purpose in charitably confusing the repertory company's highly applaudable aims and intentions with its thus far lowly accomplishments. That way lies serious damage to our theatre's security. Though the motives be of the sweetest, wrongly to encourage already not too well and trusting theatregoers to doomed disappointment is, it seems to me, little different from benevolently pasting a cure-all label on a bottle of colored water.

The Barrie play with its plot of an ambitious and vain young Scot politician who does not realize the part his simple but shrewd wife plays in his advancement, is doubtless by this time familiar enough. As said before, it is a likable little comedy even if its author, as is his habit, frequently writes with glucose in place of ink, but it is of no importance whatsoever and hardly appropriate to any dignified repertory program. Its revival, if at all, might better have been left to Broadway.

As to these revivals, we already thus early in the season, to say nothing of last, had had a surplus. I personally have nothing against them, but I am not wild about them in large doses. No one gets more genuine pleasure now and then from the reproduction of a favorite play, whether ancient or modern. But when in the course of critical duty I have to sit through a long succession of plays most of

which I have already seen half a dozen times — and in some cases all of a dozen — and many of which I know by heart, I confess that I am scarcely excited beyond all bounds.

There exists a notion, however, that stimulation is always to be had in seeing new actors act the old plays. Just what or where the big stimulation is in seeing some play like *Camille* acted by a Miss Meazle when one has already seen it acted by, among others, Duse and Bernhardt or one like *The School For Scandal* played by a Mr. Moozle when one has already seen it played by actors like Charles Wyndham and John Drew — don't tell me. For every one of the revivals that is ably acted, there are at least two or three whose performances hardly induce in anyone whose theatrical experience extends a bit farther back than *I Remember Mama* a desire to dance in the streets. What we commonly get are a lot of old plays of varying quality which are put on chiefly to gratify the vanity of actors and which are hopefully peddled to the public under the guise of cultural necessity and what the press-agents allude to as either "the theatre's proud heritage" or "the gleaming treasure chest of drama."

It is not, as some may suspect and as I have written before, that I am of the sort who always think that the actors they originally saw in a play were the best possible and that succeeding actors in the roles can not be much good. I have seen various revivals that were acted extremely well, some better in fact than in first instances. Burgess Meredith was a better Marchbanks in *Candida* than the Arnold Daly who created the role in the initial American production almost forty years before. Helen Hayes was every bit as winning a Maggie in this *What Every Woman Knows* as Maude Adams in the original American presentation. Jane Cowl was a more cajoling Juliet than even Julia Marlowe, who was a beautiful one. Grace George was quite as effective in *Alice Sit-By-The-Fire* as Ethel Barrymore. Maurice Evans' Macbeth, with all its faults, was an infinitely better one than that of Robert B. Mantell, who played the role back in 1905, and William Faver-

sham's performance in *Julius Caesar* years later made Mantell's look like chicken-feed. These are only a few out of many, so I am not being at all arbitrary on that score. But I am being arbitrary, I daresay, when I mock the contention of the producers of the revivals that many of them are justified by the fact that, however often one sees the plays, one can always find things in them which one did not find before: new meanings, new shadings, new personal interpretations, etc. Among the plays revived up to this point in the season have been, in addition to this *What Every Woman Knows*, *The Front Page*, *Obsession*, *Lady Windermere's Fan*, and *The Playboy Of The Western World*, and, in the season before, *Little Women*, *Pygmalion*, *The Would-Be Gentleman*, *As You Like It*, *The Winter's Tale*, *He Who Gets Slapped*, and *Candida*. Anyone who has to see any one of these several times before he is able thoroughly to assimilate its full import should forthwith visit his physician, or better still his psychoanalyst. My remarks are, of course and obviously, addressed to adults. In the instance of adolescents — school children, college boys and novice dramatic critics — the revivals unquestionably are of considerable profit.

At this point, I expect the usual donkey to arise and dismiss what I have said with the comment that I am "blasé." That is the adjective regularly visited upon anyone who has gone through the mill and possibly distilled a bit of critical horse-sense from experience. But, if blasé means either tired or cynical, the donkey has picked the wrong fellow. I have looked at many plays many times and am still able to get much of the relish from them that I got when first I looked at them. But they are the plays like *Oedipus* and *Hamlet*, *The Way Of The World* and *Caesar And Cleopatra*, *The Master Builder* and *The Cherry Orchard*. They are even plays like *Charley's Aunt* and, O.K., little things like Smith and Dale's *Dr. Kronkite*. But they are not the *Obsessions*, the *He Who Gets Slapped*s, and the *What Every Woman Knows*. It isn't that I have become blasé in the case of plays of that sort. I was blasé in the first place.

And there is another thing I haven't much sympathy for. That is the apology in certain quarters that these revivals arbitrarily have to be fallen back upon in view of the fact that there are no good new plays to be had. There are certainly new plays, or at least plays that have never been produced here, considerably superior any way you look at them to some of those nominated for revival. Either O'Casey's *Purple Dust* or *Red Roses For Me* makes *What Every Woman Knows* look like a counterfeit penny. O'Neill's *Lazarus Laughed*, for all its serious lapses, makes *He Who Gets Slapped* look like another. Shaw's *In Good King Charles' Golden Days*, though not Shaw at anywhere near his best, makes *The Barretts Of Wimpole Street* look like another still. And when it comes to older plays, there surely would be a deal more interest in Ibsen's locally unknown *Love's Comedy* than in his *John Gabriel Borkman*, in Shakespeare's *Measure For Measure* than in his *Henry VIII*, and in Aristophanes' *The Birds* than in his all too familiar *Lysistrata*.

With the producers making such noises over the deplorable shortage in acceptable play scripts, it might further be not unprofitable for them to consider various highly amusing, if perhaps minor, plays of foreign extraction which, in their original American tryout performances some years ago, suffered the penalty of poor adaptations and were consigned unwarrantedly to the storehouse. I suggest a few. First, the French locally titled *Room Of Dreams*, a wittily conceived, fresh and entertaining comedy so wretchedly adapted that all its value went for naught. The plot concerns a married man, at ease in all the physical comforts of his home, who becomes romantically involved with another woman, fits up an apartment for her identical in its decoration and appurtenances with his home, wakes up one morning with a bewildering hangover, and can not for the life of him make out whether he is in the boudoir of his wife or his inamorata, with the obvious embarrassing consequences. Secondly, Sacha Guitry's *The Illusionist*, one of the most jovial of his many droll comedies, which did not get all it should have from the

late Avery Hopwood and which closed after a brief engagement many years ago in Washington, D.C. The theme here is of a prestidigitator who employs his tricky professional skill to break down the resistance of a hesitant lady upon whose charms he has lodged a wishful eye. It is novel and amusing stuff and, skilfully adapted, should provide an evening of considerable amusement. Thirdly, Hermann Bahr's *The Master*, played briefly by the late Arnold Daly more than a quarter-century ago. If ably adapted, which it was not, this comedy-drama of a defeated husband guided aright by his Oriental manservant might well prove heartily acceptable theatrical fare. (A second glance at the same author's *The Yellow Nightingale* might also prove to be profitable.) And there are others. Among them, Chiarelli's *The Mask And The Face*, Rostand's *The Last Night Of Don Juan*, René Fauchois' *The Monkey Talks*, Evreinoff's *The Chief Thing*, and Savoir's *The Lion Tamer*. Given their due, they would be worth a second chance.

To the earlier remarks on the improperly trained and prepared Miss Duprez, I indicated an addendum. It concerns such misguided novices in general and, while perhaps slightly digressive in certain of its aspects, may conceivably be of some benefit to girls like her.

One of the chief frailties of many of the schools that set themselves to teach the art of acting to the young of the species, and particularly the female young, is their tendency too quickly to gratify the vanity of their pupils by allowing them to indulge themselves in too long and too difficult roles, mainly Shakespearean. The tendency is, however, understandable, since perhaps three out of every four of the girls come to the schools already firmly self-convinced that they are just a little short of perfection as Juliets and since you can't make money by not satisfying your customers, whether in the acting school business or any other.

Equipped with letters of introduction or just plain nerve, samples of these ambitious *puellæ* invade my peace from time to time, one and all of whom assure me, quite

sternly, that they are fitted for immediate appearance on the professional stage, that their teachers have encouraged them with the confidential information that their Juliets are something rather remarkable, that they wish to take advantage of their fresh youth in playing the role, and won't I, in my critical capacity, see to it that they get an early audience with indubitably interested producers. My custom is politely to tell them to forget Juliet for the time being and to go back to school and study small maids' parts.

The little dears generally become wrathful at this paternal advice. Partly to pacify them, it is my habit then to point out to them that the road to fame and glory is much more likely to be opened to them in such minor maid roles, if they are competent and attractive in them, and that for one exceptional Mary Anderson who got a chance at Juliet at the age of sixteen or one Julia Arthur who got the same chance at an even younger age there have been dozens of future stars who initiated their careers in white cap and apron, carrying a tray, announcing that the Missus would be down shortly and wouldn't the visitor seat himself, and then making a permanent exit.

Before the sweet ones can disgustedly denounce me for a cynical old dog, I thereupon load them up with statistics. Blanche Bates got her start, I tell them, as a maid in the T. Daniel Frawley stock company, at twenty dollars a week. Virginia Harned began in a maid's role of three lines in a road company of something called *Our Boarding House*. May Vokes made an entire career, and a very successful one, out of such roles. Laura Hope Crews got under way with the Belasco Alcazar Stock Company of San Francisco not only in the same kind of role but a wordless one to boot. And Carlotta Nillson's introduction to audiences was as an extra who appeared for a moment as a maid with Modjeska.

As the pouting begins slightly to diminish, I fire anew. May Robson's bow and first success was as a slavey, I inform the dears. Dorothy Donnelly made her initial appearance on the stage in her brother's stock company at the



Murray Hill Theatre in New York and after two years of maids' parts worked her way up to big roles. Lena Ashwell started on the road to fame in a part even smaller than the usual maid role in *The Pharisee*. So, too, Ellen Terry. Henrietta Crosman was not too proud to set sail in a maid's role in a minor Ohio stock company; Mary Mannerling began with three lines in the play *Hero And Leander*; and Rose Coghlan, far from leading off with Lady Macbeth, was content to make her bow as one of the witches. There are many other such examples, I apprise the by now moderately tractable young ones.

Being by this time full of wind, I amplify my lecture by hinting further to my visitors that it might be much better for them in the long run to study singing and dancing — and the art of pretty makeup — than to devote themselves to Shakespearean deep breathing exercises which probably will get them no nearer to the professional stage than they are at the moment. Detecting their belief that the musical comedy or musical show stage is a low, even degrading, form of theatrical art and hardly worthy of their high ambitions and resolve, I instruct the darlings that, to the contrary, it seems to have been one of the best of all training grounds and springboards for a dramatic career. Marie Tempest, who became the finest dramatic comédienne of her time, began on the musical stage and not only began but spent twenty years on it before appearing in the legitimate comedy, *English Nell*. Marie Löhr, the delightful English dramatic star, started as a chorus girl in George Edwardes' Gaiety company. Ina Claire began in musical comedy and went on to the Ziegfeld *Follies* before coming into her own on the dramatic stage, and it is generally overlooked that Helen Hayes' first appearance, as a youngster, was in a Lew Fields musical called *Old Dutch* at the old Herald Square Theatre.

Pauline Chase, I tell the drooping dears, was the famous Pink Pajama Girl in *The Liberty Belles*, to say nothing of a song and dance girl in *The Rounders* and other shows, before she became the star of *Peter Pan*. Billie Burke danced and sang "My Little Canoe" in *The School Girl*

and cavorted in *The Duchess Of Dantzic*, *The Blue Moon* and *The Belle Of Mayfair* before becoming Charles Hawtrey's leading lady and going on to Frohman stardom. Marie Doro was in musical comedy for years before finally becoming William Gillette's leading woman in *Clarice*. Percy Haswell didn't in turn become William H. Crane's leading woman until after she had been successful in *The Geisha*. Both Marguerite Clark and Madge Crichton were musical comedy graduates, and Cissie Loftus had her training at the Gaiety and on other musical show and vaudeville stages before she landed on the dramatic stage with Martin Harvey in *Children Of The Ghetto*.

Before the now despairing Juliets have recovered, I bounderishly continue to have at them with the information that Julia Marlowe's youthful training was in *Pinafore*, *The Chimes Of Normandy*, and *The Little Duke*, and that Mary Shaw's introduction to audiences came when she was propelled through a trap door up onto the extravaganza stage of the old Boston Museum. Shakespeare and Ibsen were her later reward and recompense. Sadie Martinot was an alumna of burlesque and comic opera; the sedate Edith Wynne Matthison, who later was to receive plaudits in drama ranging from *Electra* to *Sister Beatrice*, started in the chorus of *The School Girl*; and Annie Russell was a chorus girl before rising to great success in *Esmeralda*. And Mrs. Thomas Whiffen, of all people, got her start as a ten-shilling-a-week fairy in a burlesque show called *Turco The Terrible*.

As the little doves are being carried out by my manservant, I further call after them that Gladys Cooper, Gertrude Lawrence, Elsie Ferguson, and other such girls have found that the music show stage didn't much hurt them either.

## JOHN GABRIEL BORKMAN

NOVEMBER 12, 1946

*A revival of the play by Henrik Ibsen, translated and adapted by Eva Le Gallienne. Produced by the American Repertory Theatre for 21 performances in the International Theatre.*

## PROGRAM

MRS. BORKMAN	Margaret Webster	JOHN GABRIEL BORKMAN	
ELLA RENTHEIM	Eva Le Gallienne		Victor Jory
MALENE	Marion Evensen	FRIDA FOLDAL	Ann Jackson
ERHART BORKMAN		VILHELM FOLDAL	Ernest Truex
	William Windom		
MRS. FANNY WILTON			
	Mary Alice Moore		

**SYNOPSIS:** *The action takes place on a winter evening, at the Renheim family estate, in the neighborhood of Christiania (Oslo), about 1896. The action is continuous throughout the five scenes of the play.*

**Director:** *Eva Le Gallienne.*

ONCE UPON A TIME there was a young man whose bizarre determination it was to become a dramatic critic. Since his family for generations had enjoyed a spotless standing in the community, this naturally came as a bitter shock to them. Putting their heads together, they consulted on the best means to put a quick end to their son's disturbing resolve. After days of fruitless cogitation, an elderly uncle who had been around in the world came forth with a plan. "Let us," he said, "use our influence to get him the job he wants and further use it to arrange that his first assignment shall be the reviewing of the productions of a repertory company. If I guess correctly, he will be back home again and safely in the shoe business before many weeks have passed."

The wise old uncle proved to be right. At the end of the company's third production the young man, not waiting

for the succeeding ones, resigned his post, returned to his relieved family, in time became the best shoe salesman in town, and lived respected and happily ever afterward.

What the avuncular mastermind had appreciated was that reviewing the average repertory company is not only a tough business but one that in some respects is repulsive to any man of the proper manners and refinement. The toughness lies in the call to review in sufficiently interesting fashion a lot of old plays which already for many years have been reviewed in far more interesting fashion and about which, furthermore, the majority of the public either already know all they care to know or don't give a damn. The repulsiveness, in connection with most such companies, lies in turn in the odious necessity to write not one bad notice of a bad actor, as in the case of a non-repertory company, but a number of successive bad ones, which gives rise to the rank suspicion that the reviewer is not only prejudiced against the poor ham and is persecuting him but is something of a bounder to boot.

The job is particularly distasteful to any critic operating on behalf of a daily newspaper, since it then has the added air of having at the victim or victims with a rapid-firing gun. A monthly magazine is not so bad; by the time the next number comes out the earlier pot-shots are forgotten. Besides, even the poorest critic for a monthly automatically gains an often quite groundless reputation for more mature reflection and deliberation, and finds his opinions, however foolish and objectionable, at least partly condoned on that score.

Moreover, the business of reviewing the old plays presents to the newspaper critic, even though he write but once a week, an added problem. He can not, as in a monthly, enter into lengthy and impressive pseudo-punditical sermons on the plays, because in the first place there isn't the space and because, even if there were, such stuff wouldn't be read by any newspaper's impatient clientele and he would probably soon find himself out on his ear. Nor can he in desperation handily fall back on the old trick of telling the plots in a facetious manner, since the

plays are usually major or minor classics and to do so would not only make him out an even bigger simpleton than he probably already is but would impel those of his readers who can write to dispatch extremely embarrassing letters to his editor. There is accordingly little the poor fellow can do about it other than to be haplessly dull about the old plays and, if he is not gifted in the art of ambiguity, forthrightly to let the bad actors have it and resign himself to the category of jerk.

The American Repertory Theatre's third production, this *John Gabriel Borkman*, thus found me, in at least one of my critical mediums, in the latter rueful position. And, though an annual volume like this imposes no such restrictions and enjoys many other advantages above even the monthly periodical, it still by virtue of the quick sequence of the repertory productions finds me just the same in a similar position. It is surely neither news nor particularly stimulating reading that Ibsen's play, though one of his lesser efforts, was once esteemed as a remarkably profound drama treating of a man who sacrifices love for worldly gain and, though yet rebellious in spirit, learns the consequent doomed emptiness of life. It remains still, if neither a very profound nor for that matter even necessarily true one, a critically interesting minor classic, though one whose excess of pain and self-pity finally takes toll of any full and proper audience reaction. It remains also a testimonial to the self-deception of those early critical worshippers of Ibsen who saw in it a hard, realistic and uncompromising study rather than one basically as sentimental as almost anything written by the popular playwrights of Ibsen's day.

As for the repertory company's direction and acting, that is where my *ex officio* popularity took, I fear, another tumble. The direction by Miss Le Gallienne of her dubious adaptation of the play threw the drama completely out of focus by making Ella Rentheim the central figure in place of Borkman. The dramatist's intent was thus grossly distorted. And what the direction and adaptation failed to confuse, the acting confused most proficiently. Victor

Jory, Margaret Webster and Miss Le Gallienne not only played their roles in a single, monotonous key but so over-sentimentalized what was already sentimental enough that the drama lost a great deal of its planned meaning and took on the appearance of a Scandinavian paraphrase of *Madame X*. Jory's Borkman (though the players pronounced all other names in a strictly Manhattan manner, it was always sedulously enunciated as Borkmahn) was simply a synthesis, without any shading, of a dozen such later day grim, stage businessmen as John Ganton, Ruth-erford, and Co. As the sisters, Miss Webster and Miss Le Gallienne played as if they loved themselves far more than ever either loved or admired Borkman. Of the company, only Ernest Truex emerged with any least credit, yet even in this case it is to be remembered that the role of Foldal is automatically sympathetic to an audience and that its acting effect has always been pretty hard to miss. The lesser characters were acted as if they were figures in a Pinero burlesque. On the whole, a misguided interpretation, and one that aroused increased doubts as to the repertory competences of the company.

Paul Morrison's setting for the gloomy Borkman living-room was fully satisfactory, a far cry from that in the first production of the play in English in London in 1897, which was described by the first critic of his time as "a faded, soiled, dusty wreck of some gay French salon, originally designed, perhaps, for Offenbach's *Favart*, fitted with an incongruous Norwegian stove, a painted staircase, and a couple of chairs which were no doubt white and gold when they first figured in Tom Taylor's *Plot And Passion* or some other relic of the days before Mr. Bancroft revolutionized stage furniture, but have apparently languished ever since, unsold and unsaleable, among second-hand keys, framed lithographs of the Prince Consort, casual fire-irons and stair-rods, and other spoils of the broker." Mr. Morrison's gallery studio and snowy, pine-studded mountain top were, however, while a great deal more costly, perhaps not much more suitable than those in that original production, which were similarly described as some-

thing rather dismaying. The gallery studio, on such occasions as one could penetrate the gloomy lighting, looked like a cross between the drawing-room in a Lonsdale comedy and the Biltmore Hotel cocktail lounge. And the frosty mountain scene would have made a fairly serviceable background for an ice-skating show. There was a moment, indeed, when I imagined that Sonja Henie and Joan Hyldoft were the girls joining hands over Borkman's mortal remains.

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 THE HAVEN. NOVEMBER 13, 1946

*A murder mystery play, based on a novel by Anthony Gilbert, by Dennis Hoey. Produced by Viola Rubber in association with Johnnie Walker for 5 performances in the Playhouse.*

## PROGRAM

EDMUND DURWARD	Dennis Hoey	INSPECTOR RAMSEY	
AGATHA FORBES	Valerie Cossart		Charles Francis
MISS MARTIN	Viola Roache	CONSTABLE MILLER	
MRS. HART	Queenie Leonard		Darby Summers
ARTHUR COOK	Melville Cooper	CORONER	Ivan Simpson
GRACE KNOWLES	Eliza Sutherland	REPORTER	Keith Palmer

SYNOPSIS: The action of the play takes place in "The Haven," a house in the marshy Fen Country of Cambridgeshire, England. Act I. Scene 1. March, 1944, late afternoon. Scene 2. May, late afternoon. Scene 3. June, mid-afternoon. Act II. Scene 1. August, morning. Scene 2. Two days later, early afternoon. Scene 3. Four hours later.

Director: Clarence Derwent.

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ANOTHER FUTILE ATTEMPT at a mystery play and the sixty-sixth failure out of seventy-three tries in the last baker's dozen Broadway seasons. Add at least twelve failures in the pre-Broadway road tryouts and the grand total comes to seventy-eight collapses out of eighty-five starts. In a previous volume of these annuals I hazarded some reasons for the large mortality rate. I hazard another.

The tremendous later day increase in the reading of mystery stories has undoubtedly, if it has not surfeited the public, made it considerably more choosy in its taste. To succeed nowadays, a mystery play has to be much more ingenious than it needed to be in the past, much more exciting, and much more inventive and logical in the matter of its solution. This is not to say that some of the big successes in bygone years were not all of these, at least in their time. *The Bat* and *Seven Keys To Baldpate* were



surely expert jobs of their kind; and so, if to a lesser degree, were such as *The Argyle Case*, written in collaboration with Detective William J. Burns, *The Thirteenth Chair*, *The Cat And The Canary*, *Subway Express*, *In The Next Room*, *The Masquerader*, *The Spider*, *The Ouija Board*, *The Night Of January 16*, *On Trial*, *The Ninth Guest*, and various others. And in the farther years still there were those of the melodramatic species like Gillette's excellent synthesis of several of the Conan Doyle stories under the title *Sherlock Holmes*, *Raffles*, and *Under Cover*. The point rather is that the great majority of the plays produced in the last dozen or more years have not only lacked the kick of such plays but that of even the relatively much poorer specimens, and as a consequence have driven the public back to the stuff, good or bad but in either case economical, between book covers. A poor mystery at twenty-five cents is thus found to be paradoxically more tolerable than an equally poor one at four dollars and eighty cents, which, things today considered, may not be so very paradoxical after all.

This *The Haven* is an example in point. Its plot is still another variant of the man who does away, or tries to do away, with his successive wives in order to get their money; it includes all the old rubber-stamps from the comedy-relief maid servant to the switched poisoned drinks; its solution is obvious before it is half over; and its literary style is much more harrowing than its materials.

It is on such occasions as this that one again repeats to one's self, with considerable disquiet, the common allegation that critical attendance upon so many bad plays must in time rot the mind, and that out of such bad plays no criticism ever amounting to anything can come. There are under the circumstances only two partly assuaging thoughts. One thinks, first, of Shaw's famous brace of volumes, *Dramatic Opinions And Essays*, which guaranteed his position as the finest critic of his day and time. A large proportion of the plays reviewed in them were the trashy outgivings of such playwrights as Sardou, Sydney Grundy, Franklin Fyles, David Belasco, W. G. Wills, Augustin

Daly, Clarence Hamlyn, H. M. Paull, Wilkie Collins, Paul Potter, Hall Caine, H. V. Esmond, F. C. Burnand, Seymour Hicks, Charles Brookfield, Edward E. Rose, Wilson Barrett, Leonard Outram, Stuart Gordon, Madeleine Lucette Ryley, Robert Buchanan, Clo Graves, G. Stuart Ogilvie, G. G. Collingham, Cecil Raleigh, Henry Hamilton, W. E. Henley, Edward Knoblauch, and Robert Hichens. And among the many rubbishy plays by these authors that helped to raise Shaw to critical eminence were such unspeakable stench-pots as *The Girl I Left Behind Me*, *The Railroad Of Love*, *Poor Mr. Potton*, *The Chili Widow*, *The Manxman*, *The Sign Of The Cross*, *Jedbury Junior*, *The Romance Of The Shop-Walker*, *For The Crown*, *True Blue* ("a new and original drama of the Royal Navy"), *The Sin Of St. Hulda*, *A Night Out*, *The Matchmaker*, *The Wanderer From Venus*, *Under The Red Robe*, *The Sorrows Of Satan*, *The Daughters Of Babylon*, *Nelson's Enchantress*, *The White Heather*, *Admiral Guinea*, *The Heart Of Maryland*, *The Club Baby*, and *The Medicine Man*, not to mention various children's pantomimes and snide musical shows. If, one reassures one's self, they rotted Shaw's mind, he had then, he had thereafter, and he retains still to all intents and purposes the most intelligent and enlightened rotten mind in all England.

Being only too well aware, however, that he is no Shaw, the reviewer seeks to safeguard what small measure of mind he has left by paying as little attention to the bad plays as possible and permitting his thoughts to wander in other and different directions. As samples of such wanderings, I offer, for good or ill, a few of the thoughts that have diverted me from these murder mystery plays during the current season.

1. Jotted down in rough outline during the murder play, *Swan Song*:

To speak of impersonal criticism is as ridiculous as to speak of impersonal drama, impersonal music, impersonal painting, or impersonal reaction to alcoholic liquor. There is no such thing. There is only live criticism and

dead criticism. To speak of even the latter as impersonal is to confuse criticism with its practising corpse.

The younger the critic, the more he is fetched by mere theme. If the theme, in his eyes, is an important one, that is, one that deals with matters of immediate public concern, treatment takes second or even third place with him. It is thus that any play, however otherwise defective, which treats of something in the popular consciousness of the moment usually receives his hearty endorsement not only as a play of weight but as one of considerable artistic merit as well.

Patriotism is the enemy of sound criticism. It is thus that three-quarters of the criticism generally written in wartime never survives the armistice.

What the actress as woman is off the stage reflects itself for better or worse, whatever the nature of the role, when she is on. This may sound nonsensical, but it somehow seems to be true.

What it proves critically I wouldn't know, but the fact remains that in fifty years of the American stage only one out of the many plays that have shown a small, illuminated railroad train moving by night across the backdrop has been a failure. That one was *Fulton Of Oak Falls*, which achieved a run of but thirty-seven performances. The rest have made lots of money.

"A good play enacted by competent principals," one of my colleagues has written, "can easily survive an ineffective bit by an untalented bit player." Not always so easily. I have seen an otherwise very competently acted *The Weavers* go completely to pieces on the shoals of its child Mielchen.

The vogue of the short skirt is one of the severest trials that actresses have ever been made to suffer.

The notion, favorite of women and effeminate actors, that the critics, being for the most part not overly blessed by nature, are enviously contemptuous of handsome actors is far from the fact. Every handsome actor on the modern stage, with but one exception that I can think of, has been given a happy deal by the critics. The exception

was Lou Tellegen, who was such a bad actor that the critics, for all the good will in the world, could not help themselves. Henry Dixey, Richard Bennett as a young man, George Alexander, William Faversham, James O'Neill, E. H. Sothorn, Kyrle Bellew, James Carew, James K. Hackett, Charles Cherry, Hamilton Revelle, Harry Davenport, Vincent Serrano, Frederic De Belleville, Henry Miller, Herbert Standing, William Courtenay, Edgar Selwyn, Harry Woodruff, John Barrymore — these and others of the pictorially elect have literally been made by their friendly, ugly brothers, the critics.

There are actors, whatever their share of talent, who find audiences prejudiced against them from the start. Let an actor be too precise and glossy in his dress, like the late Robert Hilliard, or move about with a too severely erect posture, like the late Tellegen aforesaid, or steal a glance at the ladies out front so much as once, like the late Lowell Sherman, or be or do any such trivial thing and he is doomed.

I not long ago read this, from the pen of one of the colleagues: "He (the playwright) hasn't learned the most elementary principle of dramatic construction, which is that you cannot have a good person evilly put upon without making his persecutors pay for their crimes." Hardly elementary, my dear Watson, except in the case of box-office dramaturgy. Examples: Strindberg's *The Father*, Becque's *The Ravens*, Galsworthy's *Justice*, among many others.

Criticism as the adventures of a soul among masterpieces is an ideal. Criticism is most often bound to be the misadventures of a soul among gimcracks.

The critic who can remain absolutely honest in his appraisal of an exceptionally pretty actress is either a genius or a fool.

"There are," I once observed, "critics who are less interested in the impression a play makes upon them than in the impression they make upon the play." But do not jump to too sarcastic conclusions. Shaw was one such, and a better critic of the drama never lived.

Whatever the faults of much of contemporary drama, it

at least has avoided one of the weaknesses of much of contemporary literature. The latter, especially where it is the product of the younger practitioners, seems often to be ridden by the notion that there is something strangely virile and impressive in sexual intercourse conducted *al fresco*. The drama, even when written by the younger playwrights, generally refrains from any such undergraduate nonsense and keeps it indoors, where it belongs. The anatomical romance hypothetically implicit in bramble-bush, hillside, sleeping-bag and other such extramural discomforts, however starlit, is considerably less the material for serious fiction or drama than for farce, good and loud. Nature, as the saying goes, may be wonderful, but — .

2. Jotted down during the murder play, *The Dancer*:

Acting is the world's only profession in which a person is loudly applauded at the end of his day's work for drawing down a higher financial reward than he often deserves.

What of the American playwriting gods of the drama critics of yesterday? What is their standing today? Augustus Thomas, Belasco, Edward Sheldon, Charles Klein, Eugene Walter, George Broadhurst? Let us take time out for laughter.

It is a pity that so many valid dramatic ideas seem to fall into the hands of incompetent playwrights. The waste is sad to contemplate. The idea in *South Pacific*, which a few seasons ago ran for only five performances, for one example, was much too good to lose: the Negro's ironic position in the atmosphere of two different civilizations. And over the years there have been many others, light and serious, in such failures as *The Man Who Ate The Popo-mack*, treating of the influence of odors on human society; *The Upstart*, dealing with the final inefficacy of mere speech, however eloquent; etc., etc. A catalogue of all the tasty ideas that have been quickly buried in the storehouse for lack of skilful treatment would fill a book.

To critics who write praisefully of an actor having "felt" his role, let us commend Coquelin's retort to Madame Ristori's insistence that the actor can not express on the

stage an emotion which he does not really feel. "Yes, madame," observed Coquelin, "but you often die."

Thinking of illustrious French theatrical figures of the past, much of the wisdom which they otherwise contributed to the dramatic record is today found to be not only hollow but quite foolish. For example:

- (a) "A meditative being may not enter into any dramatic combination." — Paul Bourget. *Hamlet*, *Brand*, and half a hundred others make mock of the criticism.
- (b) "As romantic situations are always very special, the more you make use of them in plays the more you decrease general interest." — Brunetière. *Camille*, *Cyrano de Bergerac*, and half a hundred others are observed thumbing their noses.
- (c) "It is permissible to make a mistake in the details of the execution of a play, but it is not permissible to make a mistake . . . in facts." — Alexandre Dumas, fils. *Vide* the drama of Shakespeare and Bernard Shaw.
- (d) "A playwright must write many bad plays before he can make a good one." — Houssaye. Shakespeare, Strindberg, Ibsen, Björnson, Heijermans, Hofmannsthal, Pirandello, Hauptmann, O'Casey, O'Neill, among various others, didn't somehow seem to know it.
- (e) "The dignity of tragedy demands some grand state interest, or some passion nobler than love." — Corneille. As, for example, *Romeo And Juliet*?
- (f) "The tragic author admits atrocious crime, conspiracy, murder, parricide, regicide, and so on. Comedy, less audacious, never goes beyond the conventional, because its pictures are drawn from conventional manners." — Beaumarchais. *Arsenic And Old Lace*, for one example out of many?

3. Jotted down during the murder mystery play, *Hidden Horizon*:

The worst of all bores encountered by a dramatic critic is the one who approaches him after the first act and asks him what he thinks of the play. My own usual retort to any

such jackass is to inquire of him in turn what he thinks of a dinner after the oysters.

In real life any woman who sought to express her rapt interest in a man's words by blinking her eyes throughout his conversation would be put down by him as a transparent idiot. On the stage she is customarily regarded by the reviewers as either a delightful ingénue with a very promising future or as an actress of more mature years who has remarkably retained her youthfulness and girlish charm.

The old schoolroom saying that genius is the capacity for taking infinite pains calls for revaluation. It is mere talent, rather, which demands that capacity. I have just looked up again the stories of some hundred acknowledged geniuses from Aristophanes to Shakespeare and Bernard Shaw, along with the sculptors, painters and composers, and much of the greatest of their work seems to have been the result of no particular over-assiduity or headaches.

So many of the well-made plays of the past, notably those of Pinero and his school, give one the impression of nothing so much as well prepared dinners served with paper napkins.

The majority of our popular playwrights seem to have as their worshipful credo the old German saying, "Beautiful is youth; it never comes again." Youth to their way of thinking and writing is the desideratum above all desiderata, and their plays are full of wistful elderly creatures who yearn for its recapture and blissful return. What, one meditates in one's later years, if it did return? Gradually, as one slid back over the years, one would lose the proud and secure place one had made for one's self in the world; one would lose the happy job that has gone hand in hand with it; one would lose all the good and trusted friends whom one had gathered in the fuller years of one's life; and, worse still and more awful to contemplate, if the metamorphosis were extreme, one would wind up again having to drink milk!

On that day when an audience, as in the theatre, interrupts the progress of a film with periodic applause and remains at the end to cheer the screen play and players I will

be persuaded to believe that the moving pictures can approach the effectiveness of the living drama.

The word "charm" is usually as critically obnoxious to me as the words "glamour" and "authority," but I am afraid I shall have to fall back on it, since that is just what I am going to talk about. So: the one commodity lacking in the greater proportion of our current actresses is charm. And sadly, because most other things considered and duly allowed for, an actress without the attribute is much like a pickpocket with it. We have all kinds of actresses with talent; we have all kinds who can do their jobs well and some who can do them beautifully; we have expert technicians and very satisfactory minor players and all of that. But among the lot there are not in the present years more than a handful who have in them that rare quality which, like a prehensile mist, steals over the footlights and gathers men into its warm embrace. Without descending to the ungentlemanliness of mentioning the few actresses, young and not so young, who possess it and thus wounding the plurality who do not, I can at this moment think of only two older actresses who are blessed with the property, and only two in the middle bracket, and only two in the younger. Which amounts to just a paltry, if welcome, six out of many hundreds. Some of these others have what is known as sex appeal (a phrase also obnoxious to me — at least, I should say, literarily); some are endowed with looks; some are among the leaders in their acting age groups. But without charm they are, if the truth were told, even for a good half of the Critics' Circle little more than proficient hams.

The fact remains that there is not a single leading actor on the contemporary American stage with a speaking voice that one affectionately remembers. There is not one with the dry and wonderfully impressive voice of a William Gillette, or one with the grand romantic tones of a William Faversham, or one with the smooth finish of a John Drew, or one with the warm gentleness of a Bruce McRea, or one with the crackle and fire of an Arnold Daly, or one with the halting charm of an early William Courtenay, or



one with the winning inner smile of a Leo Ditrichstein, or one with the summer thunder of a Henry Miller, or one with the silken challenge of a Kyrle Bellew, or one with the quiet style of a Guy Standing, or one with the soft ease of a Frank Worthing or an E. S. Willard.

While plot as plot is the chief concern of our amateurs, box-office hacks and deficient literary and dramatic practitioners generally and while I myself am perfectly willing to leave it to admirers of detective stories, murder melodramas and other such diversions of the emotionally unwashed, it nevertheless paradoxically strikes me that the fear of it, instilled in them by literary and drama critics, has dulled the plays of a number of our younger and more ambitious playwrights. Afraid of plot lest they be superfluously relegated by these critics to the company of mere pulp writers, they hit it over the head, whenever it pops up in their plays, with wisecracks, satirical spoofs, heavy witticisms and similar self-criticism. The consequence is usually plays not only without sufficiently satisfactory stories, however slight, but without sufficiently satisfactory wit, humor or original viewpoint to make one remit the absence of plot.

The difference between an actress like Elisabeth Bergner and one like, say, Ethel Barrymore is the difference between a minute chemical analysis of a cocoanut pie and the cocoanut pie itself.

4. Jotted down at this *The Haven*:

A novelist may introduce his hero in any manner whatever with no worry over his readers. A dramatist, on the other hand, must often arbitrarily take his audiences into concerned consideration. To give just one example out of many, it would be next to impossible for a playwright to introduce his hero by having him rush onto the stage with the words, "Quick! There's not a moment to lose!" Since his hero in all likelihood would be cast with a more or less prominent actor he would have to figure on the audience applause which would greet his first entrance and which would hold up the stage and make the speech ridiculous. The laugh which would inevitably follow would obvi-

ously ruin not only the moment but the action immediately following.

It is generally overlooked by historians of the theatre that variety theatres in their earlier day were shunned by respectable women as if they were so many houses of ill-fame. It was Tony Pastor who rid them of their prejudice, not by changing materially the form of stage entertainment but by bribing them into his theatre with prizes of half-barrels of flour, half-tons of coal, and fancy dress patterns. The erstwhile aloof girls flocked to his playhouse in droves and his theatre soon became so packed with them that he had to add extra chairs to accommodate the overflow.

It significantly remains that ninety-five per cent of the fifty straight plays which have achieved the longest runs in our modern American theatre have had so-called happy endings.

The American passion for short sentences has gone to such an extreme that any sentence containing more than ten or twelve words is regarded not only as a literary affectation but as so extraordinarily involved that it is almost impossible to disentangle it.

The spectacle of a college professor-critic trying to be one of the boys has always been one of the most diverting acts on the bill of our national vaudeville. But it has seldom since been so amusing as the performance of the late Prof. Brander Matthews. Not only did he come out on the critical stage in a red undershirt and baggy pants and proclaim the Irish comedian, Ned Harrigan, a blood-brother to Molière but, before the stomps and whistles ended, sprang this personal nifty: "An American professor of dramatic literature, whenever he came to discuss the lyrical burlesques of Aristophanes, was in the habit of sending his whole class to Weber and Fields that his students might see for themselves the nearest modern analogy to the robust fancies of the great Greek humorist."

The villains in the old-time melodramas were almost always identified as such on the score of their superior diction. There seldom was a dyed-in-the-wool scoundrel in

those shows who didn't speak English impeccably — and whose trousers, incidentally, weren't just a shade too short.

There is much bosh about this or that Hamlet actor, whatever his other virtues, not looking like Hamlet. A number of the critics have recently been saying it again about Maurice Evans. Aside from one or two faint and debatable clues, Shakespeare gives us very little idea of what Hamlet really looked like, so who knows for certain? Hamlet's looks amount in the end very largely only to the particular prejudice of his beholder. Anyway, if the player is a good one, what matter? Where is the stage Juliet who ever looked fully like the Juliet of our imaginations? Or, God knows, the Cleopatra, Ariel, or Titania? Or even the Julius Caesar or Marc Antony? Few actors ever look exactly like the characters we are requested to imagine them to be. The only characters, indeed, who uniformly look like the actors playing them are Uncle Tom, Topsy, Charley's aunt, Mrs. Malaprop, and Cinderella's stepsisters.

Despite the common directorial belief, little is so ruinous to the effect of an actress' performance, save in farce and certain comedy, as too much vitality. The best actresses are those who silently and inwardly suggest it. The worst are those who physically demonstrate it. The great Eleonora Duse in all the thirty-odd years I beheld her in various roles in different corners of Europe and America never for a moment allowed her audiences to feel that she had just eaten a large Porterhouse steak and was rarin' to go. There was about her always, even in her earlier and more vigorous years, the faint suggestion that she was not physically quite up to snuff. The Katina Paxinou, on the other hand, habitually have at their customers with so much energy that, if Joe Louis were out front, he'd swoon.

It is said that the trouble with many of the newer playwrights is that they have not learned the business of sound play construction and that, as a consequence, their plays, even when possessed of intermittent merits, miss fire. This, in many instances, is sheer critical twaddle. The real trou-

ble with the playwrights is not that they have not mastered the dramaturgical technique but that, even were they to be veritable hounds at it, their mental, spiritual, emotional and imaginative quotient is woefully deficient. It is, of course, perfectly true that a knowledge of technique is valuable, but that it is a prime essential is far from true. Genius, or merely an unusual talent, may be ignorant of it or may loftily wave it aside and nonetheless produce plays of worth. Gorki's admittedly best play is almost amateurish technically, at least in the sense that the critics understand the word. Most of Shaw's plays would have been marked G-minus by dramaturgical professors of the George Pierce Baker school. As a matter of record, Maurine Watkins' admirable satirical farce, *Chicago*, which subsequently proved a great success in the theatre, was so marked by Baker when the author, a member of his class, submitted it to him for his criticism. Wedekind's best play is a technical botch, and so, to the pundits of his day, was Georg Kaiser's. And Strindberg's *The Dream Play* originally had the critics yelling for mama. . . . Saroyan is a particular goat of the technical assayers. If only he obeyed the dramatic rules, they say, his plays would be what they should be. As Bobby Clark exclaimed in *All Men Are Alike*, Oh, bal — derdash! If Saroyan wrote his plays according to the stricter dramaturgical formula they would be unspeakably bad. One of their greatest virtues is their very neglect of that formula. Those who believe the opposite are those who insist that poetry is not poetry unless it rhymes. Some of the very worst plays in the theatre of the last ten years have been technically perfect. And some of the very best have been as technically imperfect as Shakespeare's *King Lear* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Whenever a musical show of the past is revived, the critics are pretty sure to write that one of its greatest assets is the evocation in an audience of the nostalgic mood. This, I believe, is only partly true. What is also evoked, particularly by the lovely old songs, is the antonym of nostalgia. Fond melody does not make one think tenderly alone of

what has been and is gone. It also sometimes makes one think of what may come in one's life, of sentimental dream and hope, and of wished-for illusion and flowered horizon.

A final, horrible thought assails the critic. Maybe the very quality of such thoughts as these provide ample evidence that the rot-the-mind advocates may be right.

# JOAN OF LORRAINE. NOVEMBER 18, 1946

*A play by Maxwell Anderson. Produced by the Playwrights' Company for the rest of the season's performances in the Alvin Theatre.*

## PROGRAM

JIMMY MASTERS, THE DIRECTOR (THE INQUISITOR)	LES WARD (THE DAUPHIN)
Sam Wanamaker	Romney Brent
AL, THE STAGE MANAGER	TESSIE, THE ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGER (AURORE)
Gilmore Bush	Timothy Lynn Kears
MARY GREY (JOAN)	JEFFSON (GEORGES DE TREMOILLE)
Ingrid Bergman	Roger De Koven
ABBEY (JACQUES D'ARC)	KIPNER (REGNAULT DE CHARTRES, ARCHBISHOP OF REHIMS)
CAUCHON, BISHOP OF BEAUVAIS	Harry Irvine
Lewis Martin	LONG (DUNOIS, BASTARD OF ORLEANS)
JO CORDWELL (JEAN D'ARC)	Kevin McCarthy
Bruce Hall	QUIRKE (ST. MICHAEL)
DOLLNER (PIERRE D'ARC)	(D'ESTIVET)
Kenneth Tobey	Brooks West
CHARLES ELLING (DURAND LAXART)	MISS REEVES (ST. CATHERINE)
Charles Ellis	Ann Coray
FARWELL (JEAN DE METZ) (THE EXECUTIONER)	MISS SADLER (ST. MARGARET)
Arthur L. Sachs	Joanna Roos
THE ELECTRICIAN (BERTRAND DE POULENGY)	CHAMPLAIN (FATHER MASSIEU)
Peter Hobbs	Joseph Wiseman
NOBLE (LA HIRE)	SMITH (THOMAS DE COURCELLES)
Martin Rudy	Stephen Roberts
SHEPPARD (ALAIN CHARTIER)	MARIE, THE COSTUMER
Berry Kroeger	Lotte Staviscky

SYNOPSIS: Act I. *The stage of a theatre.* Act II. *The same stage an hour later.*

Directors: Margo Jones, Sam Wanamaker, Alan Anderson.

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WHENEVER IN THE later seasons a new play by Maxwell Anderson has come along and I have listened to its author's philosophical solemnities, I have been reminded of a little story by William B. Seabrook which Mencken and I, then

editing the old *Smart Set* magazine, printed some twenty-five years ago. It ran:

One summer evening, a sentinel who stood leaning on his spear at the entrance to the Han Ku Pass — for this was many years before the building of the Great Wall — beheld a white-bearded traveler riding toward him, seated cross-legged upon the shoulders of a black ox.

Said the venerable stranger, when he drew near and halted:

"I am an old man, and wish to die peacefully in the mountains which lie to the westward. Permit me, therefore, to depart."

But the sentinel prostrated himself and said, in awe:

"Are you not that great philosopher?"

For he suspected the wayfarer to be none other than Lao-tze, who was reputed the holiest and wisest man in China.

"That may or may not be," replied the stranger, "but I am an old man, wishing to depart from China and die in peace."

At this, the sentinel perceived that he was indeed in the presence of the great Lao-tze, who had sat for more than a hundred years in the shadow of a plum tree, uttering words of such extreme simplicity that no man in the whole world was learned enough to understand their meaning.

So the sentinel threw himself in the ox's path, and cried out:

"I am a poor and ignorant man, but I have heard it said that wisdom is a thing of priceless worth. Spare me, I beg you, ere you depart from China, one word of your great wisdom, which may, perchance, enrich my poverty or make it easier to bear."

Whereupon Lao-tze opened his mouth, and said gravely:

"Wow."

I am reminded of the story not, as may possibly be suspected, because of any resemblance which Mr. Anderson bears otherwise to the great and simple Chinese sage, but because the sum total of the distillation of his philosophical utterances seems to me very closely to resemble the "Wow." Mr. Anderson, in brief, enjoys all the attributes of a profound thinker save profundity. His features are properly etched into an impressive frown; his voice is

properly grave; his beard is properly white; and he comes into the theatre seated cross-legged upon the shoulders of what looks from a distance like a black ox. But, when he comes nearer and one gets a close look at him, the frown is seen to be painted on his brow with a makeup pencil, the basso gravity of his voice to be tenor with laryngitis, the beard's white to be talcum powder, and the black ox to be just a disguised donkey.

Consider this present exhibit. What might have been an agreeably acceptable retelling of the Joan of Arc tale (in the form of a rehearsal of a play which finds the actress playing Joan and the director at odds over the interpretation of the essence of her faith) is largely spoiled by Mr. Anderson's periodic intrusions into the proceedings with some of his characteristic cerebral exercises. These in this instance take such old medicine-man there-is-hope contours as arguing that one can not get along without faith of some sort; that such faith, defied by the question, "Why do I believe what I believe?," resolves itself finally into faith in one's self; that compromise with the forces of evil is itself evil; that Democracy is the highest form of man's mundane faith; and profundities of a remarkable piece. In other words, Mr. Anderson has thought himself out of a better play. Just as one is attracted by his abjuration of his erstwhile polychromatic porpoise verse, by his straightforward and much more welcome prose, and by his ingenuity\*in the handling of his play-within-a-play dramatic scheme, in he rides cross-legged on his masquerading ass and lectures his drama off the stage with his repertory of "Wows."

In essaying the Maid of Orleans theme, Mr. Anderson plainly accepted a difficult challenge. It is not surprising that, from any viewpoint a little loftier than that identified with Broadway, he has not succeeded, except at the box-office, which is seldom critical. The list of his silent challengers is too formidable. Shakespeare has outpoetized him; Schiller has outfelt him; Barbier has outdramatized him; Twain has outwitted him; Shaw has outthought him; even MacKaye has outwritten him. What is left? What is



left is merely a double-decker theatrical sandwich, mit Munyons — and Ingrid Bergman.

Miss Bergman is a moving picture actress with a wide and enthusiastic following. She is also, I am told, regarded by the picture people as the best of the current screen actresses, succeeding Greta Garbo to that colossal honor. As a stage actress, she is observed to have a fresh beauty, something of what is known as radiance, a pleasant voice, and, unquestionably, audience appeal. She handles her lesser scenes very well indeed, but she simply looks the more important ones rather than acts them. Her voice still misses the necessary emotional range; her gestures are still altogether too confined; and her physical movements still indicate the constriction long placed on them by the cinema camera. While it may be argued that such awkwardnesses are critically suitable to the peasant girl that Joan was and that Joan undoubtedly did not comport herself exactly like Sarah Bernhardt, it may hardly, I think, be argued that they are the marks of a great dramatic actress, which some of my colleagues have nominated Miss Bergman to be. Of the supporting company, Sam Wanamaker as the director and Romney Brent as the Dauphin are the best. Lee Simonson's settings, costumes and lighting are aptly devised. The stage direction is only so-so. What the occasion in sum amounts to is a show which suggests a Readers' Theatre performance directed by a distant relative of Pirandello and intermittently interrupted by metaphysical college yells from Mr. Anderson — with a beautiful movie actress as ballyhoo.

Since this Miss Bergman, with Pamela Ward, enjoys the rare distinction of being one of the two actresses among hundreds who in the season under consideration have proved attractive alike to the men and women in her audience, I permit myself a slight digression. For when it comes to women on the stage, that is, women as women and aside from their professional art, the disagreement between the male and female of the species this side of the footlights is usually of an intensity scarcely exceeded by their opposite views on Marie Bashkirtseff and fish as a

dinner entrée. The disagreement extends from the women's looks to their dress, from their degree of anatomical appeal to the Fahrenheit of their general personal attractiveness, and from almost everything else to definitely everything else.

Many years ago — I have told the story before — eight men whose names figured prominently in the worlds of literature and society, upon meeting a lovely young girl asked her what of all things she most desired. "I'd like to be, for just one night," she replied, "the most talked of girl in New York." Seven of the men in turn ventured the manner in which she might possibly attain her wish. It then became the privilege of the eighth, Charles Belmont Davis, brother to the impeccable Richard Harding. Waving aside all the complex and fancy suggestions of those who had spoken before him, he let out a superior grunt. "That's easy," he proclaimed, "and I'll fix it for you. Go on stage during the most elaborately costumed number in the spectacular musical show opening at the Herald Square Theatre a week from Monday in a simple little blue skirt and soft white blouse." The rest is part of past esoteric theatrical history. The girl — her name was Helen Bond — did just that, and became overnight the talk of this man's town. But not of this woman's town. They couldn't understand it. "You men are such silly children" was their only achievable explanation, and maybe they were right.

What women admire on the stage is, above all, elaborateness and fashionableness. What men admire is simplicity or — as I once defined the infallible way for a woman to dress attractively in the eyes of the male — "like a poor country girl expensively." Let all the Molyneux, Valentinas and Mainbochers in congress assembled concoct for a young woman their most imaginative and bank-roll-busting ensemble and it will still be the girl on the stage in a trimly made, simple blue dress with a dash of red somewhere on it who will win the eyes of the men and, the girl willing, the men themselves. I have been going to the theatre professionally now for more years than I like,

on my fast-crowding birthdays, to remember. I have seen the women in the audience agog over gowns on the stage that have left the men completely cold. And I have seen the men on their part fall under the spell of some woman on that same stage for no other perceptible reason than that she had a soft and very feminine bit of lace around her neck. It may puzzle the female sex; it may puzzle even the men themselves; but it is the fact.

There is also the question of charm. Just what it is that makes a woman charming to men, on or off the stage, isn't easy to tell. But one thing, I think, is true. The woman that men consider charming is seldom the one upon whom women visit the adjective. There may be agreement in the instance of some of the older actresses, but there is little in that of the younger. There was, for example, years ago, a girl in the musical comedy *Havana* — her name, as I recall, was Erminie Clarke — whom men found utterly charming, yet whom women didn't look at a second time. She wasn't pretty and she wasn't striking in figure. She was, in fact, stoop-shouldered, rather awkward, and generally on what is called the plain side. But she had that quality that captures men. It was the quality of projecting a companionable warmth without consciousness, the quality of seeming to smile without smiling, the quality of friendliness registered in terms of personal loneliness. On the stage today, in the play called *Born Yesterday*, there is another such young woman, Judy Holliday. Women admire her for her performance as an actress. Men admire her not merely for her performance as an actress but for the very definite charm she personally possesses. She, too, is not pretty and in figure leaves something to be æsthetically desired. But about her there is a strange quality of voice that makes men, even when they are laughing at her rough, tough dialogue, feel a little wistful around the gills, and an odd quality about her person that insinuates it, like a drop of absinthe in an otherwise obvious cocktail, into their biological composition. . . . There are few rules that hold good in most cases. There is one, however, that

generally does. When women in an audience beam, "Isn't she charming!" the odds are one hundred to one that their male companions don't think so.

One night about a dozen years ago, the late Edgar Selwyn, the theatrical producer and playwright, Sherwood Anderson, John D. Williams and I were motoring to Trenton to see the tryout opening of a new play. Suddenly, somewhere on the road, the three of us, I remember, tumbled ourselves against the window of the car in an eager peering-out. Selwyn, not stirring, mumbled to himself, "It's probably just a girl with an attractive walk." The old boy was right. When we sank back again and meditated, it was simply the graceful walk of the passing girl, whose looks we could not make out in the darkness, that had stimulated our attention. In much the same way, it is the movement of a woman on the stage, apart from her other possible attributes, that frequently cajoles the interest of the male sex. In the play *Payment Deferred*, Charles Laughton derisively asked his daughter what it was that her boy friend saw in her that so greatly fetched him. "He likes the way I move," she answered. Laughton gave vent to a skeptical and disgusted laugh. His male auditors, however, did nothing of the kind. They knew better. In the Jed Harris production of *Uncle Vanya*, it was Lillian Gish's first silent crossing of the stage that evoked the encomiums of the critics. Chekhov for the moment took second place to such observations as "It seems as if she's on invisible roller-skates."

We come to makeup and coiffure. The woman on the stage who, however much goo and paint she may actually have on her face, manipulates it in such wise that she appears to have little or no makeup on it, is the one whom the boys, if their wives were haplessly down with pneumonia, would elect to take out to supper. The female sex is captivated by makeup. The male, by and large, likes it only when he is not made too aware of it. And as for coiffures, the woman with a modishly up-swept hair-do rarely stands a chance against the girl with her hair down. Men

remain boys at heart to their dying day. That is the way they fondly remember the girls of their youth, and that is the way they still like them, and that is the way, or at least one of the several other suggested ways, that Ingrid Bergman gets them.

## THE FATAL WEAKNESS. NOVEMBER 19, 1946

*A comedy by George Kelly. Produced by the Theatre Guild for 119 performances in the Royale Theatre.*

### PROGRAM

MRS. PAUL ESPENSHADE	Ina Claire	PENNY	Jennifer Howard
ANNA	Mary Gildea	MR. PAUL ESPENSHADE	
MRS. MABEL WENTZ			Howard St. John
	Margaret Douglass	VERNON HASSETT	John Larson

**SYNOPSIS:** Act I. A *Saturday afternoon in June, about one o'clock.* Act II. Scene 1. *The same day, about 6:30.* Scene 2. *An hour later.* Act III. Scene 1. *A Sunday evening in August.* Scene 2. *A Saturday afternoon, some months later.*

*The entire action takes place in the apartment of Mr. and Mrs. Espenshade.*

Director: *George Kelly.*

**G**EORGE KELLY is one of our more reputable playwrights and it is always agreeable to have him back in the theatre again. He never gives the impression that the box-office is his place of worship; he usually gives the impression of a writer of intelligence trying to say something rid of the routine platitudes; and, whatever their varying quality, his plays are consequently deserving of attentive criticism. This, his latest, a study of the idiosyncrasies of a congenitally romantic woman, is, however, not one of his sounder efforts; while it has its nimble scenes and here and there equally nimble dialogue, it has also its clear frailties and the general effect of having been written on a see-saw. But it is nonetheless a far more commendable comedy than most of those unloaded onto the stage these days and one that profits further from the appearance in its leading role, after too long an absence, of that most expert of our comédiennes Ina Claire.

Since the plots of poor comedy writers are generally much plottier than those of the better and more skilful,

who regard them as of slight consequence, it is not easy to remove that of this comedy from its decorative dialogue without making it seem skimpy to the point of fleshlessness. Suffice it therefore to say that what there is of it concerns a middle-aged woman whose husband is unfaithful to her but in whom the spirit of romance is so deeply ingrained that she can not bring herself to quarrel with him and instead, after a tranquil divorce, decks herself out like the bride to be and betakes herself genially to his and the co-respondent's wedding.

When the discussion turns to writers of polite comedy, someone is usually pretty certain to defend his particular favorite with the observation that he understands women better than any of his rivals. In the late 1890's and early 1900's, it was Clyde Fitch who often benefited by the argument. A little later on, it was Avery Hopwood, and then it was Vincent Lawrence, and then it was S. N. Behrman. It seems to me, however, that only one of these four has understood women so well as, for example, the late Arthur Richman did in the years immediately past, or as George Kelly still does.

Fitch was plausible on the subject, but his female characters were mostly less women than actresses merely playing them. It was for well-known actresses that he commercially tailored his plays and in the tailoring his characters naturally absorbed many of the superficial characteristics of the actresses themselves. Fitch generally saw his women as so many female box-office treasurers and ticket-sellers. The heroines of his *Thoroughbred*, *The Cowboy And The Lady*, *Her Own Way*, and *Her Great Match* were thus not distinct characters but one and all Maxine Elliott. And, even apart from comedy, she remained the heroine of *Nathan Hale*. So, further, was it in the cases of the comedies he tailored for Clara Bloodgood (*The Way Of The World* in part, and *The Girl With The Green Eyes*, *The Coronet Of The Duchess* and *The Truth*), for Ethel Barrymore (*Captain Jinks* and *Her Sister*), for Amelia Bingham, Mary Mannering, and others, certainly including in his last years the young actress Ruth Maycliffe whom he

and Charles Cherry unsuccessfully tried to build up and for whom he carpentered *Girls* and *The Bachelor*.

Hopwood, whom I knew well in our early post-college days in New York, once said to me, "The difference between us is that you have respect for the theatre; I haven't; I look on it only as a means toward gratifying my love of money." He was an intelligent and clever comedy writer of the second rank but, when it came to women characters, he was either unacquainted with the sex or as cagily dishonest as Fitch. In these later times, Behrman, a comedy writer superior to both, indicates also a superior equipment for dealing with female characters, but his, too, though he is, it seems, completely honest, waywardly appear to be dieted in perceptible part on greasepaint.

Richman showed a penetration of female character infinitely deeper than either Fitch or Hopwood, and relatively deeper than Behrman. To any skeptic, I recommend a comparative study of such of his comedies as *Heavy Traffic*, *The Awful Truth*, *The Far Cry*, *A Proud Woman*, and *The Season Changes*. But apt as Richman was, he did not, save in certain details, capture the essence of his females quite as fully as Kelly has. The latter's psychological insight rounds out where Richman often 'simply sketched'—sketched impressively but nonetheless only sketched. In *Craig's Wife*, *Behold The Bridegroom*, and *The Deep Mrs. Sykes*, Kelly has plumbed more deftly than either Richman or Behrman. In even such of his weaker efforts as *Daisy Mame*, *Maggie The Magnificent*, and *Reflected Glory*, to say nothing of the present play, traces of his cunning are not absent.

Kelly's only competitor in the fifty-year span considered—the previous years disclosed nothing—has been the Vincent Lawrence aforesaid. This Lawrence, above every other American writer of comedy except Kelly, indicated a perception of the female sex that none of his predecessors or contemporaries approached. I am not too sure, indeed, that that perception at times was not superior to Kelly's. In comedies like *Sour Grapes*, *Among The Married*, *Two Married Men* and *A Distant Drum*, he at least



equalled in their own especial department even the best of his French coetarians. His desertion of the theatre in the years preceding his death, or at least his protracted absence from it in Hollywood surroundings which, as is their habit, decomposed his two attempts at a comeback, was a lamentable loss; for in him there were tokens of the ablest writer of polite comedy the American stage has known. Now that he is no more part of the comedy scene, Kelly accordingly takes over the lead. In this *The Fatal Weakness*, though below his best level, there is again evidence of his skill. An intelligent and observing fellow, his comedies measurably outdistance most of the contemporary English.

The presenting company is from first to last an excellent one, and it has been carefully directed by the author against a suitable background by the indefatigable Oenslager.

## ANOTHER PART OF THE FOREST

NOVEMBER 20, 1946

*A play by Lillian Hellman. Produced by Kermit Bloomgarden for 191 performances in the Fulton Theatre.*

## PROGRAM

REGINA HUBBARD	Patricia Neal	JACOB	Stanley Greene
JOHN BAGTRY	Bartlett Robinson	OSCAR HUBBARD	Scott McKay
LAVINIA HUBBARD		SIMON ISHAM	Owen Coll
	Mildred Dunnock	BIRDIE BAGTRY	Margaret Phillips
CORALEE	Beatrice Thompson	HAROLD PENNIMAN	Paul Ford
MARCUS HUBBARD	Percy Waram	GILBERT JUGGER	Gene O'Donnell
BENJAMIN HUBBARD	Leo Genn	LAURETTE SINCEE	Jean Hagen

SYNOPSIS: Act I. *A Sunday morning, June, 1880, the Alabama town of Snowden. The side terrace of the Hubbard house.* Act II. *The next evening. The living-room of the Hubbard house.* Act III. *Early the next morning. The side terrace of the Hubbard house.*

Director: Lillian Hellman.

**I** FEAR THAT all we get here is talent posturing as genius. What Miss Hellman apparently has tried to accomplish is a drama of hate and avarice in the Strindberg manner; what she has accomplished is rather a play in which overwrought melodrama so supervises character that the whole thing gradually threatens to wind up as a confessed travesty hoax. She thus finds herself in the position in which O'Neill found himself in such of his earlier plays as *The First Man* and *Welded*, before he learned the lesson that nothing is wrong with melodrama as melodrama only so long as a dramatist does not confuse it with inner intensity of theme and character.

Miss Hellman's purpose has been to show the seeds of the rapacious characters in her *The Little Foxes*, the time being twenty years (1880) before that of the latter play. In the first stages of her drama wherein is indicated the younger Hubbards' greed for a share of their father's ill-

gotten wealth, her people are moderately real and fairly convincing. But it is not long before she proceeds so excessively to melodramatize their vicious quest and so sinisterly to direct their actions that the effect is of a stageful of Simon Legrees of both sexes minus only the bloodhounds. Their explosions of venom, moreover, addedly suggest the whimsical Herman the Hermit in George M. Cohan's *Seven Keys To Baldpate* who every once in a while galloped to the footlights, fixed the audience with a glowering eye, and yelled, "I hate people!"

Miss Hellman's characters, all in all, comprise the most odious lot seen on a stage since *Pollyanna*. This, plainly enough, would not in the least count in any way against her if her gifts, like, for example, Wedekind's in *Earth Spirit* and *Pandora's Box*, were sufficient to deepen the disrelish into profound fundamentals of character. But here they are insufficient, and what we get in place of authentic characters are only highly polished phonographs screeching their records and posing as vellum-bound autobiographies. For it must be remembered that Miss Hellman is not working in symbols, but in terms of sharp realism. Furthering her confusion is also her evident belief that steadily repeated loud insistence makes for cumulatively effective drama. What it instead often makes for is monotony and dramatic decline. After her characters have growled and howled their growls and howls for a whole hour, the second hour's growls and howls are likely to cultivate only audience yawns, or snickers.

Miss Hellman is additionally guilty of some pretty shameless character hokum. Her head villain, the father of the household, is allowed to indicate his better side in a love of music, as in the old gangster melodramas, and in a taste for Greek literature. Her one deliberately contrived sympathetic character, the old wife and mother, is presented in the sure-fire tradition of pitiable loss of mind, and for good measure constantly clasps her pet Bible to her bosom. Her young trollop is the baggage who affects a tony air and who, upon subsequently drinking too much, becomes her uncouth self, to the embarrassment of the

conventional weak-willed son of the family who wants to marry her. The subsidiary villain, the elder son, registers his slumbering malevolence by gazing narrowly at whoever addresses him and pausing heavily for a few moments before replying. And so on.

It seems to me that Miss Hellman's primary weakness as a dramatist is her tendency too often to confound the italicized first person singular pronoun with strength of individual character expression. She drives emotion into her characters with a melodramatically underlined bold-face type instead of allowing it naturally and forcibly to be driven out of themselves. She is in a way, at least here, an Edgar Bergen with a cast of Charlie McCarthys, all painted in violent hues and all equipped with shrieking sirens. She has her virtues in intelligence, an absolute honesty, a simple and direct prose, and a keen sense of isolated dramatic episode. It is her greatest fault that she now and again rushes precipitantly at drama instead of craftily stalking it. It thus sometimes just stands there scared and, in its scare, becomes hysterical. And its net effect on any intelligent auditor is like a hollowed-out, illumined, glaring Hallowe'en pumpkin, hypothetically frightening but only childishly agitating. It might conceivably be possible, in Mr. Atkinson's happily exact, ironic description, to offer "a witches' brew of blackmail, insanity, cruelty, theft, torture, insult, drunkenness, with a trace of incest thrown in for good measure" and one in which, as he says, "there is hardly a moment when someone is not bellowing at someone else in a very bad temper indeed" and when "patricide and matricide and fratricide are apparently only a few years further back in history, in case Miss Hellman ever takes up the next earlier generation of Hubbard footpads." But such witches' brews miss their efficacy when the ingredients are not stirred with poetic imagination and majestic dramaturgy. Miss Hellman unfortunately uses a stick of dynamite as her swizzle.

The evening, in short, aside from a few ably contrived scenes, resembles a jammed automobile horn, combining with its arresting stridor an overdose of irritation. In it

there is much of the sidewalk excitement of one of the big movie openings. But when you get inside, there is nothing.

The author's direction of her play overemphasizes what is already overemphasized in the script. The better performances are those of Percy Waram, always a reliable actor, and Margaret Phillips. Jo Mielziner's settings of the exterior and interior of a Southern mansion are excellent, and the Lucinda Ballard period costumes are aptly designed.

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 THE PEACEMAKER. NOVEMBER 25, 1946

*A play by Kurt Unkelbach. Produced by the American Negro Theatre for 21 performances in the A.N.T. Playhouse.*

## CAST

Elwood Smith, Chickie Evans, Frederick O'Neal, John S. Brown, Hilda Haynes, and Clarice Taylor.

Director: *Marjorie Hildreth.*

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IT IS INCREASINGLY EVIDENT that what these little side-street experimental theatres most badly need are play manuscript scouts. The plays which they have put on in the last few years almost without exception have been not only dramatically insolvent but foreign to the organizations' experimental purposes. This one, for example, mistook an amateurish combination of farce and fantasy for a novel dramaturgical adventure, and the idea of a chemical which, upon being breathed, induces a pervading peace in the most bellicose for originality plus, when all it was was obviously still another paraphrase of the old truth-tree idea, already done to death in dozens of similar fantastic farces.

There are, surely, any number of infinitely better experimental manuscripts lying around for potential play scouts to uncover. There are, for example, Saroyan's *Afton Waters* and *Sweeney In The Trees*. There are O'Casey's *The Star Turns Red* and *Oak Leaves And Lavender*. There is Marcel Achard's whimsy about circus clowns and love. There is Charles DunLeavay's trilogy, *Heavenly Shebeen*. There are three plays by Edmund Wilson, that valuable literary critic. There is a script by Alexander Greendale about the effect that a spite-fence has on the lives of two mid-Western families. André Obey has a couple of unproduced plays, one of them with some of the deft humor of his

*Noah*. And, among a lot of others, there is J. B. Priestley's *They Came To A City*, which, like those noted, has been peremptorily rejected by the Broadway producers.

The mere references to these few scripts may not be enough to pique the scouts' interest, but I can not consume space detailing all of them and hence confine myself to a single illustrative outline of this one of Priestley's.

A group of assorted and bewildered English find themselves, they know not why or how, in a strange and distant land and on a walled elevation overlooking a town, the descent into which is barred by a gigantic door of steel and bronze. In the group are several members of the British nobility, a pair of middle-class business executives and the wife of one of them, a bedraggled old woman of the working class, and a bitter girl ditto. There is in the group also a young jack-of-all-trades, vaguely American, who has shipped the seas the world 'round. They are most of them an aimless lot, their past contentfully routine, their future idly in the hands of fate. Only the girl and young seafarer feel that there should be something else, something better, in store for themselves and these others. The old work-woman sits quietly aside.

The city far below arouses their curiosity, but the great door is interposed. They take stock of one another and of one another's lives and philosophies, and in the stock-taking come to verbal blows. In the midst of their exacerbation, a fanfare is suddenly heard from the city. Peering over the lower wall, now that the light has begun to lift, they take in the view. The city reminds one of the Empire Exhibition at Wembley, which Lady Loxfield allows she found frightfully tiring. And so, variously, the doubtful others, save the young working girl who sees in it possibly something else. And, surprisingly, too, Lady Loxfield's young daughter. The old work-woman still sits quietly aside.

The working girl Alice demands of the silent Joe, the seafarer, why he is skeptical. He replies that he has seen places before that looked just as good from a long way off and that made you think you were sailing into Heaven,

"but when you got inside 'em — God, they stank!" Sir George and the middle-class executives speculate on the financial, political and other practical aspects of the city's life, their doubts increasing. After all, the world they know, they agree, is a good enough world for them. And then, as suddenly as the fanfare, the great door in the tower begins slowly to open. The light, as if from a new sun, gradually floods the scene. The group decides it may be well to explore and descends into the city, with Joe still voicing his skepticism that, like all the other mirages of hope he has seen, it will turn out, for all its surface air of beauty, to be "all ribs and running sores."

The second act opens with the return of some of the explorers. The representatives of the nobility and the middle-class, save one, have not been impressed. The city looked all right, but the happiness of its inhabitants struck them as spurious. And as for its social, political and economic conditions — well, while they seemed to work and make everybody smilingly contented and at peace with one another and the world, they simply couldn't work that way elsewhere. It would be ruinous to the existing order, which, after all, has been satisfactory enough for them. Such doctrines as social justice, the equal distribution of wealth, pleasures for one and all, public ownership, no condescending public charities and the like would never do. They wonder what the others will say.

One by one the stragglers return. Alice is enthusiastic; she has seen a vision come true. Joe, also, is deeply impressed; he has seen something, he says, that he never expected to see, something he had given up all hope of seeing — a real city at last. Mrs. Batley, the old work-woman, steals in, finds the basket she had left behind, and as quietly descends into the city again, pausing only to remark that when she first saw "all them children comin' out o' them fine houses an' all their mothers lookin' so nice an' smilin' an' everything so clean an' pretty, I could 'ave cried," and to confide that "they've given me as nice a bedroom as ever you saw; all to meself too; first I've ever 'ad all to meself." Stritton, the hesitant middle-class representative who had



lingered behind, comes through the door; what he has seen, he allows, has moved him to some doubts about the old way of things, but his wife indignantly makes him follow her back into the world they came from. And all save Joe and Alice presently also follow in their footsteps, glad to return to the life they know and are accustomed to. But where, demands Lady Loxfield, is her young daughter, and learns that she has decided to cast her lot with the people of the city.

Again the fanfare of distant trumpets. Joe looks around for Alice, not having noticed her disappearance. She had eagerly slipped down into the city again. As he looks around, the great door, to his horror, begins slowly to close. He flings himself against it and, in the nick of time, Alice squeezes through. The door is now shut and the twain have lost all chance to see the city of mankind's dreams again, a city "where people don't work to keep themselves out of the gutter but work because they can see their life growing, where life isn't a dog fight around a dustbin," but something great and big and prideful and happy, where people aren't "passing the time waiting for the undertaker" but savoring of life every hour of the day.

But why, then, Alice wonders, did Joe remain on the tower; why didn't he move before the great door closed? Joe replies that once he had made up his mind and had come out he didn't dare go back. "Why shouldn't you have stayed?" demands Alice. Joe looks at her, hard. Somebody, he says, has to go back and tell what they have seen and make the doubting world believe what otherwise it might not, though far and wide there are men who want to believe. Somebody, says Joe, *has* to tell it and all these men who hope that there should be not just one such city but ten thousand, where men and women are not slaves to greed, "where nobody carries a whip and nobody rattles a chain," where men may emerge from "the darkness of their caves and feel again the warmth of the sunlight, where they are out and free at last!" Or, in the words of Whitman, "I dreamt in a dream I saw a city invincible to

the attacks of the whole earth. I dreamt that was the new city of Friends."

"Come on, Joe," calls Alice, her hand in his, "let's get going."

And as night settles peacefully over the city below, the fanfare of its trumpets sounds again over the horizon.

It is easy to foresee some of the criticisms of the play. The chief one, here and there lodged against it when several years ago it was shown in London, is that the characters merely speak about the city and that the audience should see it and not have to take the characters' word for it. This strikes me as fallacy. It is the argument of critics who do not want drama so much as they want a production. No question of *scene à faire* is involved, since the imagination supplies it very much more satisfactorily than the stage could show it and since, further, any actual presentation of the city would unavoidably minimize the effect of the succeeding act. The drama successfully offers numerous examples of similar refusals to show such scenes. To demand their showing is the province of cinema, not drama, critics.

It will also probably be argued in depreciation that the induction to the play suggests that of *Outward Bound*. That it does so superficially is to be granted, but only superficially. Moreover, the characters here are not dead, save perhaps figuratively, but alive. (Furthermore and incidentally, the idea of characters not realizing they are dead was not original to the Sutton Vane play but had been employed in a short play by Conan Doyle many years before and in *The Phantom Legion*, produced in the Playhouse, as I recall, some thirty years ago.) There will, too, from the professional Right Wing undoubtedly be the stereotyped recriminations as to the play's Communism, but there is far less Communism in Priestley's scheme than humanitarianism. His man with the red beard may as well be an implication of Christ as of a red Russian.

That the play has signal faults is quickly to be admitted. But above them it rings loud and clear and strong, and in

its final passages boasts a nice eloquence. It might easily be wrecked by careless casting and over-elaborate production, which Priestley himself cautions against. Yet if cast shrewdly and produced simply it should provide an interesting dramatic evening. It is, in short, the kind of thing to which the experimental theatres might well give a hearing, as no one else apparently will.

This *The Peacemaker*, which the Negro Theatre on the other hand deemed worthy of production, was belatedly recognized even by the group itself to have been such an error that it requested the drama critics to forget the whole thing.

## NO EXIT. NOVEMBER 26, 1946

*A play by Jean-Paul Sartre, adapted by Paul Bowles. Produced by Herman Levin and Oliver Smith for 31 performances in the Biltmore Theatre.*

## PROGRAM

GRADEAU  
BELLBOY

Claude Dauphin  
Peter Kass

INEZ  
ESTELLE

Annabella  
Ruth Ford

Scene. A room. Time. The present.

Director: John Huston.

ORIGINALLY KNOWN AS *Huis Clos*, the one hour and thirty-five minute play is the product of that Grand Dragon of Existentialism, or philosophical Dadaism, or metaphysical Delsarte, or mixture of Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and Pernod, or—to put it more simply—rococo balderdash, Jean-Paul Sartre, who is regarded by the boozoisie of Montparnasse as one of the new great hopes of French dramatic letters. These new great hopes, it would seem, come into being on the bartender's every tenth round. If it has not been an Alfred Jarry, it has been a Guillaume Apollinaire, and if it has not been an Apollinaire, it has been a Jean Cocteau, and if not a Cocteau, an Albert Camus, and if not a Camus, a Sartre. When the liquor starts working over here; they discover Powers models. Over there, they discover geniuses. The local batting average has proved so far to be noticeably the better.

This is not to say that Sartre hasn't his gifts. He may even, who knows?, one day turn out to be what the afore-said boozoisie fondly dream. There are surely some things in his favor. He is at least not given, like Apollinaire, to having spittoons suddenly become articulate and lecture the audience, or having his female characters sport Coney Island toy balloons as breasts, or causing his actors to exhort the audience, like football cheer-leaders, through

megaphones. Nor does he seem to be fetched, like Cocteau, by such similar stuff and nonsense as a man's amorous affair with a horse, or a protagonist who amputates his papier-mâché head on his final exit and leaves it at stage center staring at the audience, or marble busts that start talking like Gertrude Stein. His imagination seems to be a little more congenially restrained. He has, furthermore, selected a good teacher, and to a certain extent has tried to follow him, like so many other playwrights both foreign and native. To wit, Strindberg. He has also taken lessons on the side from another much lesser but valuable one. To wit, Wedekind. His play contains echoes of both. The characters are out of the latter, the dramatic method out of the former, and the point of view to a considerable degree out of the two in combination, with a particular bow to Strindberg. The play, in fact, might aptly be titled *Sartre Resartus, or Strindberg Again Retailored*.

If too closely scrutinized, the exhibit, despite its laudable genealogy, is likely, however, to impress one as largely bosh, since its platitudinous thesis that the individual is a unit in this world and responsible for his salvation to himself alone is dramatized in characters who are such arbitrary, open-and-shut setups that the argument becomes one-sided almost to the point of caricature. Matters are complicated to the further point of snickers by the author's contradictory philosophy that, though each man is his own hell, "hell," as he states it, "is other people." And the Weber-Fields atmosphere becomes even thicker when he still further controverts his contention that all human endeavor is futile by demonstrating that, far from being any such thing, it controls the happiness or misery of man's destiny. Both Strindberg and Wedekind were a heap smarter than that.

But if a theatregoer is not too nose-y and accepts the play as simply an amalgam of Grand Guignol shocker and sex paraphrase of *Another Part Of The Forest*, it may, though it gets to be pretty monotonous as it plows its discursive way, prove interesting enough. Sartre, though an intellectual only in the French boulevard or Swedenborg

sense, has a fairish feel for drama, a little for dramatic line and, now and again, even a suspicion of dramatic imagination, and these combine to produce a play that, while no particular critical shakes, is like one of those confidential little sideshows within a larger Montmartre carnival sideshow. In other words, something that one waywardly shillabers into one's fascination through that human weakness for self-deception which sees the Sultan's favorite nautch dancer in some poor little French provincial tart with an agitating colic.

For such as desire gory details, the play is laid in Hell and involves three characters: an executed French collaborationist, a bitter Lesbian who stole away a man's wife, and a round-heeled infanticide. This lovely trio, doomed to an eternity of one another's company, writhe in conversation, frustration and despair for what in the meantime seems an eternity of one hour and thirty-five minutes and out of their writhing arrive eventually at the revolutionary philosophical conclusion that "No one of us can save himself alone; we've all got to save ourselves together; either that or we'll lose everything together," which blows any Existentialism that happens to be lying around right out of the window, to the chagrin, undoubtedly, of the befuddled author.

On the subject of Existentialism itself, some good sense was ventilated by, of all people, the star of the play, Claude Dauphin, imported from France for the role. Asked by an interviewer how he felt about it, he said, "I will tell you how I feel about it. Possibly there is in it some great, fundamental truth, some explanation of life or whatever it is that world philosophies are supposed to contain. More probably, it seems to me, it is simply the fashionable cast of thought of the moment, a world-weariness deriving from the exhaustion of the wars. It depends upon the times for its support and justification, and it had its origins in a small but æsthetically fashionable group on Montparnasse, the same origins that surrealism had twenty-five years ago. In Paris, it is accompanied by all the trappings and properties of fashionable eccentricity:

the beret hats, the beards, the foot-long cigarette tubes, the women with bottle-bottom eye-glasses, and all the jargon and patter of meaninglessness which is part of any similar 'movement.' I would not take Sartre too seriously in the role of post-war Messiah even though I am given to know that his teachings are enjoying an enormous vogue in the north of France, in Belgium, Sweden, and Denmark. As a personality, however, I will confine myself to saying that he is gay and pleasant and so much more attractive than his disciples. Those are the ones you should see!"

Dauphin gives a thorough performance of the collaborationist character; Ruth Ford is impressive as the infanticide; and, as the Lesbian, Annabella, the cinema actress, does little more than stand around like Cocteau wax-work with an unintelligible French-Alsace accent. The single set by Frederick Kiesler, a copy of that used in the French production, is appropriate to the play's mood. The direction by John Huston does little to help the author, and misses signally at the important point where the great door to Hell is suddenly thrown open and the characters, not being able to resolve their exits, find themselves inextricably doomed to everlasting close association.

## A FAMILY AFFAIR. NOVEMBER 27, 1946

*A comedy by Henry R. Misrock. Produced by Jesse Long and Edward S. Hart for 6 performances in the Playhouse.*

## PROGRAM

FLORENCE McCONNEL	Emily Ross	MIKE CASSIDY	Allan Stevenson
MARY	Amelie Barleon	GEORGE WEAVER	Robert Smith
ALICE JONES	Jewel Curtis	PEGGY WALLACE	
JULIA WALLACE	Ann Mason		Margaret Garland
WALTER WALLACE	John Williams	DR. CHRISTOPHER PATTERSON	
JOHNNY WALLACE	Joel Marston		Frank Lyon
MARTHA	Lenore Thomas	GREGORIN	Anatole Winogradoff

SYNOPSIS: *The action of the play takes place in the Wallace living-room, New York City. Late summer 1946. Act I. About five o'clock in the afternoon. Act II. Several hours later. Act III. Early next morning.*

Director: Alexander Kirkland.

AT ONE POINT in his play, Mr. Misrock has his young playwright turn on the ingénue and shout, "George Jean Nathan can criticize me, but you can't!" I accept the generous invitation and with equal generosity criticize not only his character's play but also Mr. Misrock's. First, Mr. Misrock. What he has attempted is a comedy in which the aforesaid young playwright writes a play about what he impertinently imagines to be the *ex officio* sexual life of his parents who, upon reading the script, are at first indignant, then conclude it may not be such a bad idea, and go about hoping to resolve it into fact. The young man's consequent alarm causes him to denounce his play as rubbish, but unnecessarily, since by that time his parents have found out the fact for themselves and have concluded that any such *ex officio* sexual activities are not what he has cracked them up to be and that the old moral order is best all around.

It is quite possible that a Molnár, Guitry or George Kelly might have made something out of the theme, but



all that Mr. Misrock has made is a mess. Apparently devoid of the wit necessary to make unbelievable characters at least obliquely acceptable, he has tried to make them seem faintly lifelike by having them constantly allude to current, familiar names and personalities: Truman, Hemingway, Pegler, Manville, O'Neill, Sibelius, Errol Flynn, Jimmy Fidler, etc., etc., with the obvious result that, far from seeming at all lifelike, they seem to be merely lay phonographs as in other such misguided Broadway turkeys. His notion of sardonic humor consists additionally in such facetiæ as "The readers of *Life* exist from one Friday to the next only to find out what they think"; his idea of saucy situation consists in a woman's believing the worst when she enters a room suddenly and observes a man seated on a couch with a girl who has momentarily removed her shoes; and — as a symptom of all this and more to come — he opens his play with the female who, immediately upon entering her friends' apartment, rushes to the window and exclaims, "Oh, what a lovely view!"

As for criticizing Mr. Misrock's young playwright's play, the latter takes the words out of my mouth with his own comment on it.

The acting and direction may be left to the imagination, if sufficiently diseased.

## CHRISTOPHER BLAKE. NOVEMBER 30, 1946

*A play by Moss Hart. Produced by Joseph M. Hyman and Bernard Hart for 120 performances in the Music Box.*

## PROGRAM

A SOLDIER	<i>Ira Cirker</i>	THE DOORMAN	<i>Tom Morrison</i>
A MARINE	<i>Dan Frazer</i>	THE STAGE MANAGER	<i>Carl Judd</i>
A RADIO MAN	<i>Hugh Williamson</i>	BUTTS	<i>Hugh Williamson</i>
A PHOTOGRAPHER	<i>Jack Garbutt</i>	MISS HOLLY	<i>Peggy Van Vleet</i>
ANOTHER PHOTOGRAPHER	<i>Charles S. Dubin</i>	AN ACTRESS	<i>Phyllis Tyler</i>
A RADIO ANNOUNCER	<i>Kermit Kegley</i>	JOHNNY	<i>Mack Twamley</i>
A NEWSREEL MAN	<i>Frederic de Wilde</i>	RAY	<i>Dickie Leone</i>
ANOTHER NEWSREEL MAN	<i>Allen Shaw</i>	THE HEADMASTER	<i>Ronald Alexander</i>
A MILITARY AIDE	<i>Carl Judd</i>	THE JANITOR	<i>Maximilian Schultz</i>
A GENERAL	<i>Frank M. Thomas</i>	A BEGGAR	<i>Edward Pegram</i>
AN ADMIRAL	<i>Tom Morrison</i>	AN ANGRY MAN	<i>Allen Shaw</i>
ANOTHER GENERAL	<i>Guy Tano</i>	A POLICEMAN	<i>Kermit Kegley</i>
THE PRESIDENT	<i>Irving Fisher</i>	MISS MACINTYRE	<i>Kay Loring</i>
CHRISTOPHER BLAKE	<i>Richard Tyler</i>	THE SUPERINTENDENT	<i>Frank M. Thomas</i>
MR. BLAKE	<i>Shepperd Strudwick</i>	THE MOTHER	<i>Susan Sanderson</i>
MRS. BLAKE	<i>Martha Sleeper</i>	THE FATHER	<i>Hugh Williamson</i>
MR. KURLICK	<i>Francis de Sales</i>	THE BAILIFF	<i>Ronald Alexander</i>
MR. CALDWELL	<i>Watson White</i>	PHOTOGRAPHERS	<i>Guy Tano</i>
JUDGE ADAMSON	<i>Robert Harrison</i>		<i>Bill Hoe</i>
A COURTROOM ATTENDANT	<i>Raymond Van Sickle</i>	THREE BOYS	<i>Charles Nevil</i>
			<i>Dickie Leone</i>
			<i>Mack Twamley</i>
		ANOTHER BAILIFF	<i>Allen Shaw</i>
		A JUDGE	<i>Frank M. Thomas</i>

SYNOPSIS: *The action of the play takes place in Judge Adamson's chambers and courtroom, and in the private world of Christopher Blake. Act I. Scene 1. The White House. Scene 2. The chambers. Scene 3. The stage of a theater. Scene 4. The chambers. Scene 5. A poorhouse. Scene 6. The chambers. Act II. Scene 1. Christopher's courtroom. Scene 2. The courtroom.*

Director: Moss Hart.

IT MAY BE that others feel differently, but when a playwright lays siege to my emotions with everything from mortars to atom bombs I somehow do not respond as he desires me to. That is why Mr. Hart and his exhibit leave me quite unmoved. When it comes to playing on the keyboard of my feelings, I prefer the more reticent hand of suggestion and implication. It is entirely possible that the theme of a child forced in court to choose between his divorced parents might touch my tender sensibilities and through my visible reaction impress my neighbors in the audience that I am after all, whatever people may say, a fellow of some heart and sufferance. But I find it difficult to impress them in any such manner when Mr. Hart challenges me with the tear-wrenching weapons of the drama of many years ago and treats me as if I still had not outgrown *East Lynne* and *Madame X*.

If the business of the meeting is an operation on my sentimental palpitations, I am also a bad patient when a lot of revolving stages are made to substitute for a circulatory imagination. The most beautiful and touching drama somehow has not and never has had need of two or three dozen mechanics, engineers, carpenters, and plumbers. They may contribute handily to a serviceable theatrical show but, unless I have been going to the wrong theatres all these years, I have not yet seen them contribute to really sound and moving drama. Furthermore, I am so peculiarly constituted that, under the circumstances, much of the sympathy the playwright intends me to extend to his characters wanders to the overworked stagehands, upon whom he has placed the burden that his imagination has not been able to shoulder.

These, of course, are merely the reactions of a single person. But since that single person is myself and since I happen to be the one expressing opinions in this place, I suppose that you will have to grin and bear them. I do not doubt that there are many others whom Mr. Hart's machinations will plentifully moisten, and I wish them all the

pleasant and agreeable melancholy that they customarily derive from such assaults upon their emotions. Mr. Hart, to give him credit, so to speak, has supplied the necessary materials, and with a vengeance. But, if you want to see any tears in these elderly eyes, I am afraid that you will have to wait until someone again puts on a dramatist whose heart and mind and pen are dipped in more delicately affecting fluids.

Mr. Hart's emotional grand larceny stops at nothing. Resorting to the device of alternately showing the judge's chambers and courtroom in which the divorce proceedings are in motion and scenes picturing the incidental imaginings of the couple's young son, he runs the hokum gamut from the father's and mother's grief-laden conferences with the child to the latter's prayer in church for a reprieve from his unhappiness, and from episodes in a poorhouse from which the parents are to be evicted by the cruel superintendent to the time-honored agonized cry of the child, "I didn't ask to be born!" And all staged with those long pauses between speeches and that physical slow motion on the part of the leading actors which are supposed to heighten the sense of their inner torture. In only one detail does the playwright depart from such exhibits' routine, and that is in not finally reuniting the separated couple in their child's interest. Yet even here one has the feeling that the business has been offered less because the husband and wife would honestly conduct themselves as they do — the wife's antecedent comportment with her son suggests that she would listen to her husband's plea to return to him — than because of an eye to theatrical novelty and surprise. In the family crisis which Mr. Hart pictures, as in many such human crises, people often have a way of acting conventionally and not like O. Henry.

The play in its judge's chambers and courtroom scenes is substantially still another variant of the kind of drama popular in the theatre in past decades, and in its scenes of the child's fancy, owes some debt to a variety of plays ranging from Eleanor Gates' *The Poor Little Rich Girl* to F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Vegetable* and from others like

Hauptmann's *Hannele* to the famous old extravaganza, *The Magic Doll*. Though, furthermore, we are assured that the psychological aspects of the child's flights of imagination have been passed upon and endorsed by Mr. Hart's corps of psychiatrists and psychoanalysts, I am not persuaded that a child whose theatregoing had necessarily been limited to the contemporary playhouse would visualize himself as an actor in the long ago elegant cape-swinging tradition of Richard Mansfield or Leo Ditrichstein, or that, at his innocent age, he would be more greatly impressed by Hamlet than any other stage character, or, in another direction, that he would be likely to imagine himself committing suicide immediately after receiving the nation's highest honor from the President of the United States in person. Such things, unless I am severely mistaken, smack much more of Broadway playwrighting than true psychoanalysis.

It is thus, as I have indicated, that a play and production involving five revolving stages and a large cast at an expense of one hundred and eighty thousand dollars fail so far as I am concerned to accomplish any slightest comparable effect to such infinitely simpler and more reputable plays on much the same basic theme as Brieux's *Suzette* and *The Deserter*, Atlas' *Wednesday's Child*, or, certainly, Strindberg's *The Link*. All that Mr. Hart's sums up to is emotional boogie-woogie on a gilt piano.

As the father, Shepperd Strudwick so overemotionalizes his voice that he gives the impression of playing for the benefit of an opera scout in the house. In the wife and mother role, Martha Sleeper acts strictly in the old Theodore Kremer black-dress melodramatic tradition. Much better is young Richard Tyler as the son, though it seems to me that the critical enthusiasm which has greeted his performance is based not so much on his acting as on the fact that he is called upon to be on the stage throughout the evening, which in such youthful cases is frequently confused with an extended histrionic ability. Harry Hornor's scenic machinery is more intricate than imaginative.

## YEARS AGO. DECEMBER 3, 1946

*A comedy by Ruth Gordon. Produced by Max Gordon for the rest of the season's performances in the Mansfield Theatre.*

## PROGRAM

LINTON JONES	<i>Fredric March</i>	FRED WHITMARSH	<i>Richard Simon</i>
ANNIE JONES	<i>Florence Eldridge</i>	MR. SPARROW	<i>Seth Arnold</i>
RUTH GORDON JONES	<i>Patricia Kirkland</i>	MR. BAGLEY	<i>Frederic Persson</i>
KATHERINE FOLLETT	<i>Bethel Leslie</i>	MISS GLAVIN	<i>Judith Cargill</i>
ANNA WITHAM	<i>Jennifer Bunker</i>	PUNK	<i>A Cat</i>

SYNOPSIS: Act I. An evening in January. Years ago. Act II. Scene 1. The following evening. Scene 2. The next afternoon. Act III. Five months later, June. About eleven o'clock in the morning.

The scene is the dining-room-sitting-room at 14 Elmwood Avenue, Wollaston, Massachusetts.

Director: Garson Kanin.

THERE ARE SOME PLAYS, their number hardly legion, for which one feels an affection bordering on the amorous. There are others, their number more extensive, for which one feels an acute dislike. And there are occasional others for which one's feeling, so far as one has any the one way or the other, may be described as brotherly. These are the plays of a sisterly nature which, devoid of any eventfulness or particular excitement and familiar from long acquaintance, are all right in their way and perfectly respectable but neither very stimulating nor depressing and acceptable in a friendly yet unemotional manner, like a relative. Miss Gordon's autobiographical comedy, treating of her youthful resolve to be an actress and her Massachusetts family's reactions, is such a one. It is a mildly agreeable and mildly pleasant little thing, never quite interesting enough though never really dull, and on the whole the kind that amiable criticism just pats lightly on the head in passing.

Miss Gordon's virtue is that she remains simple and unaffected in the telling of her own story and never seems to hope to give it anything more of importance than what her young girl's eyes saw at the time. This is a quality in her writing which was to be anticipated by those who some years ago read the entertaining stories of her youth which she contributed to the since defunct *Forum* magazine. She appreciates that, while honesty in itself may be often far from charming, honesty when combined with simplicity and artlessness generally is. And it is that attribute that here makes rather winning a play that, were it to posture for so long as a minute, would be doomed to sentimental death.

It is not the materials out of which the author has fashioned her small opus that matter; it is this innocence of approach. That the innocence may be calculated has nothing to do with the case. It is Miss Gordon's knack of making it seem natural and uncalculated that counts. As for the materials themselves, not much may be said, politely. They are largely of the routine woof: the humble, old-fashioned, small-town home, the stern father, the loving, bustling mother, the ambitious young daughter up against parental prejudice, the bashful boy suitor, the 'way down East handyman, the giggling neighbor girls, the family cat. . . . And, among many other stereotypes, the creation of an atmosphere of the past (the play is laid *circa* 1912) in repeated allusions to the public figures, actors and actresses, magazines, etc., of the period; the comedy involving the use of the strange telephone; the even much older comedy involving the trepidation upon receipt of an unaccustomed telegram; the daughter's recitation of Shakespeare (as usual, while perched on a stairway); the Saturday night bath; the covert reading of a forbidden magazine concealed in the covers of another; the paterfamilias with heart of gold under his explosive exterior; the sound effect of the night train to New York, including the hokum melancholy whistle; the cracks about Cremona five-cent cigars; the mother's interruption of the young lovers by calling downstairs and inquiring the hour; etc., etc. And not forgetting the

father's winding of his watch before mounting the stairs at bedtime, the wistful sacrifice of a treasured heirloom to obtain funds for the daughter's dreamed-of career, the comedy carrying of a trunk downstairs; and so on.

I cite all these simply in indication of their obviousness and familiarity. I am far from arguing, like one or two of my fellow reviewers, however, that they are purely theatrical devices and that Miss Gordon's recourse to them indicates her dramatic artificiality. They are rather directly out of life and actuality and have become theatrical simply through long over-use and endless stage repetition. It is thus that, while they may be perfectly true to Miss Gordon's dramatic picture, they are paradoxically false to its proper effect. To achieve an acceptable realism in the theatre, a playwright has need of some critical fancy.

Patricia Kirkland, except for a directed tendency too steadily to attack her role in *T-formation*, does nicely by the daughter's part. Florence Eldridge interprets the mother chiefly with facial expressions; if the play runs for long her features may never get back to normal. March, as the father, comes in like a lion and goes out like a Lambs Club; there probably has not been such unrelieved ham yelling and roaring on a stage since the late William H. Thompson ripped the plaster off the walls of the old California Theatre in San Francisco as Natchez Jim in *The White Slave*. Garson Kanin's direction, usually much more sensitive, doubtless resorted to such external vibrations to conceal the play's inner lack of them.



## IF THE SHOE FITS. DECEMBER 5, 1946

*A musical comedy with book by June Carroll and Robert Duke, lyrics by Miss Carroll, music by David Raksin. Produced by Leonard Sillman for 21 performances in the Century Theatre.*

### PROGRAM

BRODERICK	Jack Williams	MAJOR DOMO	Youka Troubetzkoy
CINDERELLA	Leila Ernst	LADY GUINEVERE	Eleanor Jones
MISTRESS SPRATT	Jody Gilbert	LADY PERSEVERE	Joyce White
DELILAH	Marilyn Day	DAME CRACKLE	Chloe Owen
THAIS	Sherle North	THE BAKER	Ray Cook
BUTCHER BOY	Richard Wentworth	DAME CRUMPLE	Joyce White
FIRST UNDERTAKER	Don Mayo	DAME CRINKLE	Jean Olds
SECOND UNDERTAKER		PRINCE CHARMING	Edward Dew
	Walter Kattwinkel	WIDOW WILLOW	Adrienne
LORELI	Gail Adams	KATE	Barbara Perry
LILITH	Eileen Ayers	KING KINDLY	Edward Lambert
LADY EVE	Florence Desmond	HIS MAGNIFICENCE	Frank Milton
HERMAN	Joe Besser	COURT DANCER	Vincent Carbone

**SYNOPSIS:** *The story takes place during the Middle Ages in one of those mythical kingdoms known only to writers of musical comedies, in this case, "The Kingdom of Nicely."* Act I. Scene 1. Town gate. Scene 2. Cinderella's kitchen. Scene 3. Palace gate. Scene 4. Ballroom. Scene 5. Ante-room of palace. Scene 6. Ballroom. Act II. Scene 1. Town gate. Scene 2. Cinderella's kitchen. Scene 3. Palace gate. Scene 4. Village street. Scene 5. Palace gate. Scene 6. Ante-room. Scene 7. Village street.

Director: Eugene S. Bryden.

**L**IKE THOSE SECOND-RATE sidestreet restaurants that catch the passerby's eye with profuse fronts of fresh steaks, lobsters and vegetables and that would be satisfactory if only one could eat in the windows, the show is externally engaging enough, but once you get inside its outer layer of scenery the ptomaine sets in. The scenery in point, which fits the Cinderella scheme of the show, consists in a large book which opens and discloses in the pop-up manner of children's books the play's various settings. The idea,

hailed as something strikingly original, is largely an extension, and a felicitous one, of a similar device used all of thirty years ago in the revues of the Marigny Theatre in Paris. The book idea, though not developed as here, was also, unless I am mistaken, used not very long thereafter in the local Jane Cowl production of *Twelfth Night*. But, as noted, once you pass the scenery, the victuals are poisonous. I wrote some time back that, as musical shows go these seasons, I am willing to settle for one good tune, one fair joke, and one pretty girl. This *If The Shoe Fits* cheats even such generosity. It has the pretty girl in Leila Ernst, but otherwise not even the single good tune or the single fair joke.

I had always thought that, when they advertised something as a musical show, music might be expected to be one of the ingredients. In this case not only isn't there the one good tune but there isn't anything that resembles music of any kind, though the program announces that something bearing the name has been contributed by one Raksin. There are, true, a number of men in the orchestra pit equipped with what seem to be musical instruments and they go through the accepted motions at the behest of a gentleman with black curly hair who waves a stick at them, but the sounds that emanate bear the same relation to music that a boiler factory bears to Schirmer's. I had also always been given to understand that another element properly to be expected in a musical show was humor. Undoubtedly the producer of this one thought that he had a load of it in a fat comedian who puts his hand to his hip and minces around the stage from time to time. But I somehow, alas, can not share the producer's belief. Nor do I seem to find anything irresistibly funny in endless disquisitions on Cinderella's virginity, the Fairy Godmother's employment of anatomical gymnastics to woo the Prince on her own behalf, and other such amendments to the time-favored nursery story. The notion of a modern paraphrase of the fairy tale isn't bad, and the present editors make a very fair beginning in reversing the positions of Cinderella and the two step-sisters who have gone to so

many balls at the palace that they long for just one night at home and an early bed. But thereafter their inventiveness collapses, and the show with it.

Among those, aside from the comely Miss Ernst, involved in the requiem were Florence Desmond, an English music hall comédienne, who did a lifelike imitation of Tallulah Bankhead that lasted two minutes and who made a futile effort to be amusing for the other one hundred and forty-eight; Edward Dew, who as Prince Charming apparently imagined a coy grin to be symbolic of a romantic personality; and Joe Besser, whose performance of the above-noted *Ecce Homo* role contributed to the Cinderella story one more fairy than it originally bargained for. There were also, need I add, the customary tap dancers and the diminutive assistant comedian who gets lost under one of the tall actors.

It is reported that the show cost and lost more than three hundred thousand dollars.

## LAND'S END. DECEMBER 11, 1946

*A dramatization by Thomas Job of the Mary Ellen Chase novel, Dawn In Lyonesse, with incidental music by Paul Bowles. Produced by Paul Feigay and George Somnes for 5 performances in the Playhouse.*

### PROGRAM

SUSAN PENGILLY	Shirley Booth	MR. HARRIS	Ross Chetwynd
LIZE	Amelia Romano	THE PROFESSOR	Theodore Newton
ELLEN PASCOE	Helen Craig	DR. GREGORY	Horace Cooper
MR. TREVETHA	Fred Stewart	KITCHEN BOY	Michael Feigay
DEREK TREGONNY	Walter Coy	MRS. TREGONNY	Merle Maddern
MISS PENROSE	Frieda Altman	GRANDMOTHER TREGONNY	Minnie Dupree
MRS. BOND	Mabel Acker	THE RECTOR	Jay Barney
MISS CLARK	Diane de Brett	FIRST FISHERMAN	Joseph Foley
MR. BROOKS	Clement Brace	SECOND FISHERMAN	Sydney Boyd
MRS. BROOKS	Xenia Bank	THIRD FISHERMAN	Ross Chetwood
MR. BREGSTOCKE	Joseph Foley	FOURTH FISHERMAN	Fred Stewart
MR. DERBY	Sydney Boyd		

**SYNOPSIS:** *The time is between the two wars. Act I. Scene 1. Mr. Trevetha's fish chopping shelter at St. Ives, Cornwall. Early evening in March. Scene 2. Dining-room of the Tower Hotel. Early afternoon, one month later. Scene 3. Ellen's and Susan's room in the Tower Hotel, Tintagel. Night in July. 10:30 p.m. Act II. Scene 1. Corner of the dining-room in the Tower Hotel. Evening in September. Scene 2. The Men-an-Tol Stone at Land's End. Early the next morning. Act III. Scene 1. Dining-room in the Tower Hotel. Early next morning. Scene 2. Living-room of the Tregonnys at Land's End. Before dawn. About 3 a.m.*

Director: Robert Lewis.

THE PLAY, laid in Cornwall, seeks to show the influence of the indigenous Tristram and Iseult legend on three modern servers in the territory's industries. The influence is such that it brings a young fisherman to betray his fiancée with her closest woman friend and in contrition to hurl himself to his death from a high cliff. Its influence on me, on the other hand, was simply speculation as to why it was resorted to to give a veneer of hypothetical impor-

tance to what was largely the plot of various other plays which had never heard of the legend. I do not say that the legend was laid on the plot falsely, but it haplessly had that air, since the plot might better have gone its way without any assistance from it. As matters stand, the influence of the legend, which here is a variant involving a man and two women, seems actually to be confined for nine-tenths of the evening solely to one of the latter, and even so consists merely in her periodic reading of a few lines of the fable to the accompaniment of some wistful eye-rolling. The orchestration of traditionary tale and immediate drama is a one-finger job. It hasn't an iota of the skill which Irish dramatists have indicated in depicting the influence on simple folk of the legends of the old Celtic gods or, in another direction, of the wit with which a playwright like Lennox Robinson has shown, in *Drama At Innish* (locally called *Is Life Worth Living?*), the influence on such folk of morbid European drama. Indeed, it hasn't even the measure of conviction achieved by the librettists of a musical like *Song Of Norway*.

There are several other discommoding things about Mr. Job's play. Along toward the middle of it, when the amorous complications have about reached their climax, the Cornish Tristram seizes hold of the Cornish Iseult and cries out, "There is something I want to tell you!" But as in a number of other plays, the girl, instead of hearing him out and settling matters then and there, cries out in turn that she does not choose to listen to him and only wants him to kiss her and prolong the play another spell, thus robbing the audience of an extra hour's sleep. There is, too, that business of kissing generally. I have nothing against kisses; in fact, I have been known to enjoy them enormously, on occasion. But some playwrights' theories on the subject have long puzzled me. These theories seem to be of a twofold and strange sort. The first takes form in the species of kiss bestowed upon the heroine by one of the male characters which makes its recipient shrink from its donor with a look of horrified loathing akin only to that induced on beholding a leper dining off a garbage-

can. The exact pathometabolismic nature of a such a buss has for years eluded my powers of clinical analysis, otherwise admittedly spacious. The second takes the form of an antithetical behavior on the part of the heroine who, upon receiving what seems to be a perfectly conventional, routine smack from the hero, not only promptly acts as if she had swallowed a whole production of *Ten Nights In A Barroom* but satisfiedly comports herself as if the fellow were thenceforth hers body and soul till death did them part. Mr. Job appears to be a steward of this latter theory.

In his meritorious book on the theatre published almost forty years ago, Walter Prichard Eaton had some still apt words on the matter. "Once it was a bed, now it is a kiss, that Belasco cannot get along without in his dramas. Having discovered that beds are also used to sleep upon, the Wizard has discarded them from his list of theatrical properties, and adopted kisses. The Belasco kiss differs from every other variety. 'When all is said, what is a kiss?' asked Cyrano, and he replied to his own question that it was 'a rose red dot upon the letter i in loving,' and many other delectable things besides, which so moved the heart of the fair Roxane that she cried out, 'Come and gather it, the supreme flower!' But there the matter ended. She didn't say anything more about that particular kiss all the rest of the play. The i was dotted, the page turned. Roxane, however, was French. Mr. Belasco's heroines are not. Such *carpe diem* philosophy is impossible for them. They go on talking about the kiss till the end of the chapter. It is evidently a tremendous event in their young lives." He then concluded: "If there's anybody who doesn't know that the kiss of first love, the betrothal embrace, is a high and holy thing, a civilized community is no place for him. And if there is anybody who does not know that there are also other kisses sweet and harmless, that the hymn of love's omnipotence never was and never can be chanted with meeting lips alone, he is a very curious sort of person. Mr. Belasco is overworking this kissing business. He has tried to give to something superficial and episodic the air of depth and finality. He has turned a simple manifesta-

tion of half physical passion into a dramatic convention and sought with it to achieve an effect of emotional reality."

The Belascos are still with us, and Mr. Job is not the least of them.

A word on the acting of the leading parts in his play. Walter Coy, bearing such a resemblance to the late Wendell Willkie that the plot took on the suggestion of a protagonist torn between the Republican and Democratic parties, displayed in the Tristram role all the attributes of a wood-carving save artistry. Helen Craig, while able in one or two scenes, registered the gradual acquisition of spiritual exaltation mainly through an increased protrusion of her eyeballs and a crescendo opening of her oral cavity. And Shirley Booth, who previously has given a very good account of herself in comedy roles, played the third angle of the tragic triangle as if the latter were an instrument in a swing band. Donald Oenslager's settings of the cliff and rock bordered Cornwall coast looked like the scenery painted by rural summer theatre apprentices for a production of Ibsen and were so out of perspective on the small stage of the Playhouse that the actors' heads seemed in imminent danger of poking themselves through the Cornish skies. Paul Bowles' incidental music, so far as I could determine from what seemed to be a mechanical recording at times so blurred one could barely hear it, appeared to consist chiefly of slivers of Wagner's *Tristan And Isolde* themes. The stage direction, along with all the rest, missed entirely the capturing of the mood essential to the play. The effort, in short, was a far from dishonorable one, but just the same a practical botch.

## ANDROCLES AND THE LION. DECEMBER 19, 1946

*A revival of the satirical extravaganza by George Bernard Shaw, preceded by Sean O'Casey's one-act comedy, Pound On Demand. Produced by the American Repertory Theatre for 40 performances in the International Theatre.*

## PROGRAM

## POUND ON DEMAND

GIRL	<i>Cavada Humphrey</i>	WOMAN	<i>Margaret Webster</i>
JERRY	<i>Philip Bourneuf</i>	POLICEMAN	<i>Eugene Stuckmann</i>
SAMMY	<i>Ernest Truex</i>		

SYNOPSIS: Scene: A postoffice.

## ANDROCLES AND THE LION

LION	<i>John Becher</i>	SPINTHO	<i>Eli Wallach</i>
MEGAERA	<i>Marion Evensen</i>	OX-DRIVER	<i>Robert Rawlings</i>
ANDROCLES	<i>Ernest Truex</i>	CALL-BOY	<i>Arthur Keegan</i>
BEGGAR	<i>Arthur Keegan</i>	SECUTOR	<i>Efrem Zimbalist, Jr.</i>
CENTURION	<i>John Straub</i>	RETIARIUS	<i>William Windom</i>
CAPTAIN	<i>Richard Waring</i>	EDITOR	<i>Raymond Greenleaf</i>
LAVINIA	<i>June Duprez</i>	MENAGERIE KEEPER	
LENTULUS	<i>Eugene Stuckmann</i>		<i>Ed Woodhead</i>
METELLUS	<i>Angus Cairns</i>	CAESAR	<i>Philip Bourneuf</i>
FERROVIUS	<i>Victor Jory</i>		

SYNOPSIS: Prologue: A jungle. Act I. The outskirts of Rome. Act II. Scene 1. The Coliseum. Entrance to the arena, behind Emperor's box. Scene 2. The arena. Scene 3. Same as Act II, Scene 1.

Directors: Victor Jory, Margaret Webster.

**F**IRST PRODUCED locally thirty-four years ago and revived twelve later, Shaw's harlequinade of Christianity in conflict with ancient Rome still has plenty of life in it despite its age. I appreciate that such a remark usually irritates the kind of person who believes that nothing stales so much as humor originally considered rather daring. But, though the animadversions may have lost some of the needle prick they once had, their propulsive wisdom and wit has not materially dimmed, and the play provides far



better than usual theatre fare. O'Casey's little vaudeville, dealing again with paraphrases of his great inebriate twain, Fluther and Joxer, this time engaged in trying to cash a savings note in a postoffice, is, of course, one of his decidedly minor efforts but highly comical withal, though — as in the case of the Shaw play — one would never suspect it from the repertory group's performance, which in both instances was pathetically incompetent.

While it surely does not hold true of all repertory companies, it seems to have been the theory of this particular one that actors who can not act even one play will somehow take on stature if they are allowed to act half a dozen. The results, as indicated in previous chapters, were what might have been expected, and in the two plays under immediate discussion even worse. The attempt, in the O'Casey play, to capture the Irish flavor, accent, and humor was catastrophic. And the Shaw play gave the effect of being acted in larger part not only by amateurs but by amateurs at a first rehearsal. The direction in both cases was wretched; Marc Blitzstein's so-called incidental music for *Androcles* consisted mostly in the habitual loud tooting of trumpets; and only Wolfgang Roth's stage settings for the latter indicated the slightest sense of what was going on, or should have been. That the company soon thereafter expired as a repertory group was not surprising.

In view of the enjoyment to be had, even in the face of its incompetent performance, from the O'Casey piece, it is regrettable that the old and still curiously persistent theory of the local public's prejudice against one-act plays should continue to operate as expansively as it does, since we are thereby deprived of much of the pleasure that has been had by European theatregoers. That the theory, despite occasional superficial appearances, is a bilious one is proved by the fact that when one-act plays, singly or in program combination, have been good plays or even indifferent ones properly produced and acted, their reception over the long years has been a cordial one. In evidence we need only reflect on the Mrs. Fiske program of three such plays many years ago, the Frohman bill of three

short Barrie plays, the Holbrook Blinn series of programs at the old Princess Theatre, the program of O'Neill short sea plays at the Provincetown Playhouse, the trio of Dunsany and Shaw plays at the Neighborhood Playhouse, the visiting Abbey Theatre company's program of one-acters, and the more recent Noel Coward venture, a great success in the instance of three different bills of three short plays each. Or, furthermore, on the equally great success in vaudeville of any number of one-acters like Barrie's *The Twelve-Pound Look*, O'Neill's *In The Zone*, etc., etc. When one-act plays or one-act play programs have failed, they have failed not because the plays were one-act plays but because they were either very poor one-act plays or good one-act plays wrecked by improper presentation. The bill of three one-acters produced in the Hudson Theatre in the 1938-39 season thus lasted for only three performances because the plays were of no account and because they were badly produced and badly acted. And the bill of three known by the general title, *Spook Scandals*, failed even more promptly several seasons ago for the same reasons.

As a picture of what sometimes happens to these one-act programs, I give you a first-hand account of a project launched about half a dozen years ago by Eddie Dowling. What originally promised to provide one of the most entertaining evenings of its season was a bill called by the group title, *Life, Laughter and Tears*, and made up of two short plays by Saroyan and one by O'Casey. The Saroyan plays were *Hello Out There* and *Coming Through The Rye*; the O'Casey play was *The End Of The Beginning*.

*Hello Out There*, as was appreciated in a subsequent season by those who saw it as a curtain-raiser to Chesterton's *Magic*, is an uncommonly potent little drama which utilizes as instruments to project a plea for understanding and justice a man in a Texas jail cell accused of rape and hearing from far off the approach of a lynch mob, together with a slavey around the prison who is drawn to him through the loneliness and despair of her own forlorn and vacant life. Written with a directness not hitherto as-

sociated with its author, it exercises a compelling effect and, short as it is, is an immensely more eloquent play on its theme than any half dozen such lengthier efforts as *They Shall Not Die*, *Too Many Heroes*, et al.

*Coming Through The Rye*, which is in the scattered fantasy form more usual to its author, pictures a variety of men, women and children awaiting imminent birth into the world, but already fully cognizant of the shape their lives are to have. The quasi-Maeterlinckian theme is only sketchily developed by Saroyan, yet for all its odds-and-ends quality the little play has a winning freshness, warm gentility, and antic drollery.

*The End Of The Beginning* is a coup in slapstick humor, but slapstick humor with a difference. The difference is the interpretation of character through the slat rather than the slat for its own sake. The result is a hilarious bout between still further counterparts of O'Casey's memorable Fluther and Joxer who are presented in the position of trying to run a household abandoned by the testy spouse of one of them.

Repeating that the evening, when I reviewed it in the brief tryout period on the road, had in it potentialities to give its sick season a badly needed shot in the arm, I proceed to a business not customarily engaged in by a reviewer, to wit, an instructive description of what the production had to go through in its early preparatory stages and a gaping wonder, in view of what happened, that it emerged in any stage at all. My excuse for this indelicatessen was an initial affection for the manuscripts of the three plays, which the authors had sent to me and which, in turn, I had sent with my critical recommendations to Mr. Dowling for possible production.

This Dowling, who in the past was more hospitable to desertful manuscripts than the majority of his fellow producers, read the scripts, admired them, and said that he would be delighted to do them immediately. There was only one hitch: he allowed that he didn't have the necessary gravy, or money as it is known in less refined circles. Since such money, the world being what it is, is somewhat

essential to putting on a show, it was seemly that he get hold of some, and get hold of the required amount he presently did, but with a string tied to it. The string in question was the backers' imposed stipulation that — as though he were not a sufficiently proven director himself — he take on in that capacity a young man named Schuyler Watts, hitherto unidentified in the theatre save as one who had monkeyed with the text of *Hamlet* for the disastrous Leslie Howard production of the play some seasons before. Peremptorily announcing that he was to be complete boss of the works, and expressing his skepticism that Dowling knew anything at all about either producing or acting, this amateur proceeded to go gravely about the job of creating the production.

His first move was to hire as scene designer a then unknown fancy youth of twenty-one or two, one Smith. This virtuoso, operating in artistic collaboration with him, forthwith executed three settings that, when I deposited eyes on them at the tryout performance in the McCarter Theatre at Princeton, made me think I was a victim of malignant myopia. The set for the first play, described by O'Casey as the kitchen of a small Irish cottage, disclosed something that closely resembled a cross between the salon of a Hollywood Spanish villa and the reception hall of a Palm Beach clubhouse, the staircase in turn looking like something out of a Doge's Venetian palace picked up at a Hearst auction sale. The ceiling was handsomely frescoed in pale pinks, mauves and blues, apparently to catch the effect of a sunrise on the Bay of Naples; what looked vaguely like ecclesiastical stained-glass windows were to be observed at the rear; and the tablecloths and other appurtenances befitted some particularly *recherché* grill-room. The O'Casey roughhouse humors were naturally baffled by the setting and much of the comic stage business could not be distinguished by the audience because of the interposition of the elaborate furnishings and their World's Fair colorings. When all this was pointed out to Watts by the management, he is said to have replied loftily that the setting was perfect for the play, inasmuch as it was, in his

analysis, not a farce or comedy at all but a "satirical museum piece," and that too much humor would be quite ill-suited to it.

The set for *Hello Out There*, which was plainly indicated by Saroyan to be a dingy cell in a small Texas prison, was beheld to be the damndest contraption seen since Salvador Dali last fell off the waterwagon. In the center of the stage was a huge menagerie cage on a movable platform and behind it a gala panorama of windmills and something that looked like a grove of eucalyptus trees. During the action, the cage was rolled down to the footlights and then slowly away from them, as in an old Earl Carroll chorus number in which the tenor sang "My Honolulu Honey, It's Aloha." Since the play's whole point is the protagonist's complete isolation from the outside world and his futile effort to have it hear his cry, the effect of the set's great open spaces, to say nothing of the cage that gave him a ridiculous kinship to the Ringlings' Gargantua, may be imagined. When all this was in turn pointed out to Watts by the management — including John Tuerk, its experienced business head — he is said to have retorted regally that he would permit the set to be simplified and changed only over his dead body, inasmuch as the play was, in his analysis, not what Saroyan had thought it was, to wit, an exercise in approximate realism, but a "fantastic dream."

The set for the third play, *Coming Through The Rye*, described by Saroyan as "a large room beyond which is visible, in varying degrees of light and movement, infinite space — sun, moon, planets, stars, constellations, and so on," became under Virtuosi Watts' and Smith's magic a tight, three-walled room painted to resemble the Marine Grill of the Traymore Hotel in Atlantic City. At stage left was a red-grilled window of the species favorite of the old Alice Foote Macdougall tea-rooms; at stage right an open small brown door of the kind customarily encountered in the gents' rooms of Third Avenue saloons; on a table at right an enormous public address system through which was funneled, with the volume of a Sixth Avenue

auctioneer, a ham basso profundo in lieu of the "solemn but witty" voice of the Creator nominated by the author; and at the back of the room, instead of the stipulated infinite space, there was a bluish flat wall perfectly suited to a Harlem funeral parlor. When all this was again pointed out to Watts as being unimaginatively corruptive of the play, he is said to have agreed that the toilet door might possibly well be removed but that the rest was thoroughly right, inasmuch as the play was, in his analysis, not the fantasy its author oddly believed it to be, but a satire.

The costumes were another item. The plain, forty-five year old Irish *hausfrau* of O'Casey's play, whom O'Casey had clad in an overall, was dressed like the soubrette shepherdess in an old Gaiety musical comedy: short pale blue skirt with sheer, light silk stockings, French high-heeled shoes, jaunty straw hat, etc. The young feminine love interest of *Coming Through The Rye* was presented in a long, form-fitting, slinky blue-black satin gown strewn with gold ornaments that needed only Valeska Suratt singing "If The Man In The Moon Were A Coon" or Theda Bara rolling on a sofa with Francis X. Bushman to make it moderately appropriate. The members of the Texas lynch mob in *Hello Out There* had apparently just returned from playing in a tennis tournament at the country club. And it was insisted that Steve, the character with a lech for women in the second Saroyan play, could not possibly in view of that lech wear a linen shirt but necessarily and logically had to wear a sweater.

The direction of the themselves fully competent players as it was appraised by your reporter was something to make the hair on an Alaskan malemute stand on end and the malemute itself rush out and bite the first half-dozen Eskimos who bore even a faint resemblance to Mr. Watts. At the conclusion of *Hello Out There*, the slavey, who in Saroyan's script rises slowly and painfully from the floor to which she has been thrown, was directed to speak her lines in the erect, heroic posture of the Statue of Liberty and, to add to the absurdity, the platform on which she stood was in the meantime moved rhythmically backward from the

footlights as in a Folies Bergère grand finale. The small colored boy in *Coming Through The Rye* was made to count 1-2-3 to himself before each of his lines, giving the poor kid, who in his natural delivery was excellent, the appearance of playing a shadow version of hop, skip and jump. And the heroine in the same play — in the author's designation a gay, simple, carefree creature — was placed in charge of a carriage instructor from the Hudnut beauty works so that her walk might achieve an imperious, fashionable air.

The two leading players in the realistic *Hello Out There* were given written instructions to remember carefully a "mistique" reading of their lines, and those in O'Casey's literal farce were impressed with the director's conviction that the play was "expressionistic" and, sourer, that their delivery of O'Casey's sock-'em laughs should be of such a nature that the laughs should "undulate," whatever that might mean, and should never come positively to the surface. There should also, it was specified, be an "inner rhythm" to the movement (in O'Casey's design, a knock-'em-down-and-drag-'em-out hell-raiser) and to this end an assisting metronome was suggested. Another such metronome, incidentally, was recommended for *Coming Through The Rye*. The little boy Butch, in the last-named play, was directed to stand close to the footlights and to keep tossing a baseball up and down, which so irritated and distracted the audience that it could not fasten its attention on the dialogue. The girl in *Hello Out There* was made to prowl around the outer side of the prison cage like a house-detective in a Philadelphia hotel, making it incumbent on the man in the cage to keep turning his head rapidly this way and that, as at a three-ring circus. And at odd moments, Mr. Dowling, who was in the cage, was directed to crawl around on the floor as if searching frantically for a lost collar-button.

Which is the merest hint of the general directorial genius.

Some other select savories. Someone had caused the play programs to subdivide the group title into three parts and

gratuitously to identify the several plays respectively as *Life, Laughter, Tears*, thus affronting the audience's intelligence by instructing it when it was expected to laugh, to cry, and to ruminate. Since the two Saroyan plays were written separately and originally were not expected to follow each other, and since both accidentally had protagonists from the state of Texas, it was overlooked that an audience might naturally be confused into imagining that the second play was a continuation of the first, particularly as murder figured in both. Simply changing the reference to Texas in the second play to another state would have got rid of the confusion, but nothing was done.

The stage lighting for O'Casey's farce and Saroyan's fantasy was largely of a dim piece, killing the comedy of the former and making the latter at times unintentionally humorous. And such suggestions as incorporating into the fantasy a silent old Jew sitting apart, who would finally as the characters were departing for earth go up to a mutt dog in the girl's arms, lightly pat it on the head, and sigh "Me and you!" and who would be followed to earth by the little Negro and then at length by a young Catholic priest — thus in a flash dramatizing the prejudices to be encountered and suffered in the world — such suggestions were abruptly spurned. As was, too, a suggestion for the final curtain of the fantasy with toy firecrackers heard faintly popping far below and with the voice of God gently remarking to itself: "My children on earth seem to be having trouble among themselves once again. Won't they ever learn the lesson my Boy tried to teach them?"

The shambles promptly went its due way. Its New York opening was cancelled and what might have been resolved into a worthy production landed in the storehouse kerplunk, to the theorists' renewed proclamation, "See! They don't want one-act plays!"



## BURLESQUE. DECEMBER 25, 1946

*A revival of the play by George Manker Watters and Arthur Hopkins. Produced by Jean Dalrymple for the rest of the season's performances in the Belasco Theatre.*

## PROGRAM

BONNY	Jean Parker	ECDYSLAST	Irene Allarie
SAMMY	Robert Weil	TENOR	Santo Scudi
SKID	Bert Lahr	ORCHESTRA LEADER	
LEFTY	Ross Hertz		Milton Merrill
A FIREMAN	Norman Morgan	GIRLS OF THE CHORUS:	
MAZIE	Kay Buckley	MARIE	Joan Andre
GUSSIE	Terri Blanchard	KIKI	Carolyn Boyce
SYLVIA MARCO	Joyce Mathews	BUSTER	Millicent Roy
BOZO	Bobby Barry	SUGAR	Ronnie Rogers
HARVEY HOWELL		MIMI	Gene Gilmour
	Charles G. Martin	MITSY	Darin Jennings
JERRY EVANS	Harold Bostwick	BLOSSOM	Ruth Maitland
A BELL BOY	Norman Morgan	BUBBLES	Jeri Archer
STAGE CARPENTER	Michael Keene	CUDDLES	Eleanor Prentiss

SYNOPSIS: Act I. A basement dressing-room in a mid-West burlesque theatre. February. Act II. Living-room of a New York hotel suite. June. Act III. Scene 1. Stage of the Star Theatre, Paterson, N. J. September. Scene 2. The opening of Lefty's burlesque show. The following night.

*The action of the play occurs some years ago.*

Director: Arthur Hopkins.

THE REVIVAL is more effective in the performance department than the original production. I am glad to be able to say so because I have not been able to say as much about some other revivals this season and because I am getting a little wobbly from complaints that I seem to be living so far in the past that in all likelihood I even prefer tin bathtubs. Though I can not bring myself enthusiastically to believe that everything today is better than it was years ago, I am, I hope, not such a loon as to believe that everything in the past was perfect. So I can't see why I am

nominated for immediate deposit in the Old Men's Home simply on the score that I happened to start reviewing before *Woman Bites Dog* or why having covered the theatre for more years than the dramatic critic of *Mademoiselle* should be such a handicap in judging the business of acting.

To the files of those who would attribute to me an undying veneration of the good 'old days, I contribute these typical wonders of the period:

The gala opening performance of the new Union Square Theatre in September, 1893, was provided by an "opera company" made up of eight ham singers accompanied by a lone pianist, albeit the ushers were resplendent in Turkish costumes, the house staff even more so in gaudy crimson military uniforms, the attendants in the ladies' room costumed like Peg Woffington, and the manager, one Fynes, adorned with a purple dress suit and with studs fashioned out of ten dollar gold pieces.

Bronson Howard, one of the leading playwrights of his era, wrote a three-act play called *Old Love Letters* of which he was extremely proud but which was slyly cut down to half an hour's running time by the manager to whom he submitted it and became a hit in vaudeville.

*The Fast Mail*, a melodrama of the Nineties, though it contained an express train shooting across the stage, found that in order to achieve success it had to add a steamboat puffing madly down a river and later, to achieve even larger success, an explosion that blew the boat to pieces.

The celebrated Castle Square Opera Company used the same set of scenery to depict successively the Coronation Chamber in the Palace of the King of Portugal (*The Queen's Lace Handkerchief*), the Room in the Palace of Castellar (*Il Trovatore*), the Marchesa's Villa near Venice (*The Fencing Master*), the Ballroom at Castle Chute (*Lily Of Killarney*), the Gallery in Lothario's manor house at Cipriani (*Mignon*), the Governor's Palace on the Island of Estrella (*Paul Jones*), the Boudoir of Mme. de Maintenon (*Nanon*), the Grand Salon of the Marquis' Palace (*Maritana*), the Grand Salon of the Countess Pal-

metica's Palace (*The Beggar Student*), the Reception Room in Count Arnheim's Château (*The Bohemian Girl*), the Reception Hall in the Château de Grimm (*Madeleine, or The Magic Kiss*), the Ducal Palace (*Boccaccio*), the Hall in the King's Palace at Memphis (*Aïda*), the Banquet Hall in Rudolph's Castle (*Lurline*), the Tapestry Chamber in the Palace (*Lohengrin*), the Drawing-room at Sir Henry Ashton's (*Lucia di Lammermoor*), the Grand Hall of the Palace (*The Grand Duchess*), the Armorial Hall in the Ducal Palace (*Rigoletto*), the ball-room of the Palace of Rousillon (*Olivette*), the Grand Salon (*La Gioconda*), and the Salon in the Castle Berkenfeld (*The Daughter Of The Regiment*).

Charles L. Davis achieved fame and fortune as Alvin Joslin in the play of that name by standing in front of the theatres in which he was booked before each performance, his tie, shirt front, cuffs and suspender buckles flashing sizeable diamonds, or lifelike imitations thereof, and giving thunderous testimonials to his own acting genius.

A. Oakey Hall, erstwhile Mayor of the City of New York, made his debut as an actor, and a bad one, in the Park Theatre in a play called *The Crucible*, with seats selling at fifty dollars apiece.

Edward E. Rice, composer of the enormously successful comic opera, *Evangeline*, whose musicianship was nil, whistled his entire score for a musician to set on paper.

The Vokes family of five were so popular in a travesty called *The Belles Of The Kitchen* that for nineteen years they played to business as great as some of the Grand Opera companies of the period.

C. M. S. McLellan, who years afterward wrote Mrs. Fiske's big artistic success, *Leah Kleschna*, galvanized the patriotism of the peanut gallery with a musical show called *Yankee Doodle Dandy* before George M. Cohan was scarcely old enough to hold an American flag.

Julia Marlowe, then known as Fannie Brough, enriched her preparations for the Shakespearean drama by swinging Indian clubs and lifting heavy dumbbells.

Denman Thompson's famous *The Old Homestead*,

which played to huge audiences for thirty years, was developed from an equally popular vaudeville sketch first called, of all things, *The Female Bathers*.

A play titled *The Grocery Man Of Avenue B*, a prime stinker if ever there was one, of which the historians seem to be peculiarly unaware, enjoyed a New York run of more than six hundred consecutive performances.

A celebrated Shakespearean actor bore the name Ben de Bar.

Any critic who ventured to give a production of Augustin Daly's a bad notice was subsequently assigned reviewing seats in the second balcony behind a post, though Daly had himself once been a critic for the *New York Sun*, and a tough one.

Trashy plays like *In The Palace Of The King* and *The Dawn Of A Tomorrow* made fortunes, whereas plays like Sophocles' *Electra* and Yeats' *The Land Of Heart's Desire* lost them.

Charles Burnham, later a professional moralist who waged a ferocious battle against alleged indecency on the stage, was the manager of Wallack's Theatre when Olga Nethersole appeared there in *Sapho* and was raided by the police, at which time he fought the moralists tooth and nail.

When Lew Dockstader, the blackface minstrel, played Baltimore, his local gags were confected for him by that subsequently illustrious scholar, H. L. Mencken.

The celebrated Lydia Thompson's British Blondes company, which scored a sensation, contained only four authentic blondes, the rest of the girls having been dyed up to fit the show's title.

A poor little Irish-American girl named Sally Eagan, a native of New York, became a chorus girl in a company starring Marie Aimée, a well-known Paris actress, learned to mimic her accent, and subsequently became famous as a French item under the name of Sadie Martinot.

When Jacques Offenbach came to America in 1876 to conduct an orchestra in his opera bouffe compositions the audiences expected that he would also offer himself as a

Can-Can dancer and, when he didn't, visited grim financial failure on his concerts.

During the engagement of the melodrama, *Siberia*, in the H. R. Jacobs Theatre in Cleveland, Ohio, the off-stage ominous wolf howls were the product of three youthful members of the Rockefeller, Harkness, and Hanna families, at twenty-five cents per performance.

The souvenirs at the fashionable première of the musical comedy, *Miss Bob White*, at the Broad Street Theatre in Philadelphia were small boxes of vanilla cookies, two to the box.

With considerable advance press-agent fanfare, the *London Folies* opened at the Weber and Fields Music Hall. Expecting something pretty grand in the manner of the *Ziegfeld Folies*, the first night audience appeared on the scene dressed to the ears and breathlessly agog. What it saw was a seedy company of nine vaudeville entertainers on a stage embellished with a single black velvet curtain and adorned with a rented piano.

Richard Mansfield produced Shaw's *The Devil's Disciple* in the Fifth Avenue Theatre in 1897, with Shaw's Essie, a grown girl of eighteen, changed to a child of ten. "It will be easier to win the sympathy of audiences with a child," he said. The box-office receipts proved him to be right.

A horde of speculators bought up all the seats not only for the entire New York engagement of *Cyrano de Bergerac* when the play was first shown in America in the following year but subsequently beat the company to the road and bought up all the seats for the road engagement, taking customers around the country for as high as thirty dollars a ticket.

The enduring legend that plays and musical shows in the good old days never closed as abruptly as they often do today fails to find substantiation in such records as *The Gadfly* with fourteen performances, *My Innocent Boy* with sixteen, *The Master Builder* in its first showing with one, *The Countess Chiffon* with eight, *The Storm* with one, *The Carpetbagger* with fourteen, *Twelve Months Later*

with eight, *The Knickerbocker Girl* with fourteen, *Cupid Outwits Adam* with eight, *The Military Maid* with eight, George Ade's *The Night Of The Fourth* with fourteen, *Unleavened Bread* with twelve, *Manon Lescaut* with fifteen, *The Ladies' Paradise*, the first musical comedy ever produced in the Metropolitan Opera House, with twenty-four, *Joan O' The Shoals* with eight, *Life* with seven, Sudermann's *The Joy of Living* with nineteen, *Are You My Father?* with eleven, Clyde Fitch's *Major André* with twelve, Lee Ditrichstein's *What's The Matter With Susan?* with fifteen, *My Lady Molly* with fifteen, *Rosmersholm* in its first American production with eight, *An African Millionaire* with eight, *The Superstition Of Sue* by Paul Armstrong with eight, Fitch's *The Coronet Of The Duchess* with nineteen, *The West Point Cadet* with four, Glen MacDonough's *Bird Center* with thirteen, Harry B. Smith's *A China Doll* with eighteen, Sudermann's *The Fires Of St. John* in its first showing in New York with eight, Pinero's *A Wife Without A Smile* with sixteen, *Once Upon A Time* with eight, *Robert Burns* with one, *The Trifler* with four, W. W. Jacobs' and Louis N. Parker's *Beauty And The Barge* with twelve, H. V. Esmond's *Grierson's Way* with twelve, *The Optimist* with eight, Grant Stewart's *Mistakes Will Happen* with eight, Jesse Lynch Williams' *The Stolen Story* with fifteen, Baldwin Sloane's *The Mimic And The Maid* with two, Rex Beach's *The Spoilers* with eighteen, *The Lilac Room* with four, Henry Arthur Jones' *The Evangelist* with nineteen, *The Narrow Path* with eight, and all kinds of others.

Black dresses were invariably insisted upon in the case of female characters in all Russian plays.

No play with a Mexican or Spanish setting failed to include a male character named Pedro and a female named Chiquita.

Favorite dialogue ran as follows:

"You — wouldn't dare!"

"Wouldn't dare *what?*"

"Wouldn't dare come out with it! With what is going

on in that devilish mind of yours. It's a lie! A lie, I tell you! And I can prove it!"

By no means overlooking the line: "Life doesn't stop; one gets lonely; one craves children and a home of one's own."

In the Hal Reid and other melodramas, Abe Lincolns always had putty moles the size of Bartlett pears.

Be things as they may with me, it nevertheless contrarily seems to your venerable amateur that Bert Lahr and Jean Parker are a slicker combination in the leading roles of this *Burlesque* revival than Hal Skelly and Barbara Stanwyck, though while I am about it I may as well again risk the charge of old fogyness by saying that they were darn good, too. But all the same, Lahr and his greater exaggerations impress me as being more closely suited to the role of the burlesque hooper than Skelly, and the Parker girl, for all her intermittent lapses, a shrewder choice for his vis-à-vis than the Mlle. Stanwyck.

As for the play itself, it seems to me today just what it seemed twenty years ago. That is, the more or less conventional exhibit about the suddenly successful husband who deserts the wife who went through hard times with him and who, when the luck turns on him, is only too happy to go back to her. The conventionality, true, is slightly minimized by giving the whole thing a burlesque background, but only slightly, since the background has been laid in with some effort and, for all it matters, might every bit as well, so far as the plot goes, be night club, vaudeville, or even musical comedy and grand opera. If the burlesque element had been more knowledgeably and expertly treated, the play would be much more interesting, since so far as I know we have not had one faithfully portraying the people of that gaudy American art. To note the difference between the burlesque atmosphere of the Messrs. Watters and Hopkins and the genuine article, all one has to do is to sniff it as Gypsy Rose Lee distilled it in her novel of several years ago or as Prof. Bernard Sobel has detailed it in his history of the late lamented institu-

tion. The present play, which furthermore is badly dated, only faintly suggests it. So faintly, indeed, that if Bozo Snyder, Sliding Billy Watson, Al Reeves or any other of its old illuminati were to sample it, they probably wouldn't recognize it and would conclude that they had misread the marquee sign and had got by mistake into *What Every Woman Knows*, the plot of which isn't so awfully different.

When I wistfully allude to burlesque as deceased, I speak, of course, only as a New Yorker, since it still flourishes in other more civilized American cities. In New York, however, we innocents are forbidden by censorship any longer to engage it, on the ground that a woman performer who removes her outer clothing and reveals herself in a circus trapeze artiste's approximation to nudity and then rotates her hips like the ballerina in *Schéhérazade* is likely so to inflame the libido of the attendant United States Navy personnel that no lady in the five boroughs would be safe from a fate more horrible than cholera morbus. That neither the gentlemen in the Navy nor such landlubbers as myself would seem to need similar moral protection from the many plays which present promiscuous sex in a very winning light, this same censorship apparently overlooks. I may be a bizarre morsel, but I somehow can not see just how a burlesque comedian who stands on a ladder in order to peek down a woman's décolleté will destroy my own or anybody else's moral rectitude while plays like *O Mistress Mine* and *The Voice of the Turtle*, which detail the charms of a ladderless scrutiny, will apparently on the other hand no'end increase and solidify it.

That there was occasional dirt in burlesque, no one is going to deny. But there certainly was no more and generally infinitely less than in any dozen such locally unmo-lested legitimate theatre plays and shows as *Catherine Was Great*, *School For Brides*, *Brother Cain*, *Round Trip*, *The Duchess Misbehaves*, *Second Best Bed*, *Maid In The Ozarks*, *Try And Get It*, *Wallflower*, *Peep Show*, *Chicken Every Sunday*, and *Too Hot For Maneuvers*.



## WONDERFUL JOURNEY. DECEMBER 25, 1946

*A comedy-fantasy by Harry Segall. Produced by Theron Bamberger in association with Richard Skinner for 9 performances in the Coronet Theatre.*

### PROGRAM

1ST ESCORT	<i>Phil Stein</i>	MAX LEVENE	<i>Philip Loeb</i>
2ND ESCORT	<i>Michael Lewin</i>	SUSIE	<i>Ann Sullivan</i>
JOE PENDLETON	<i>Donald Murphy</i>	LIEUT. WILLIAMS	<i>Barry Kelley</i>
MESSENGER 7013	<i>Wallace Acton</i>	PLAIN-CLOTHESMAN	<i>Phil Stein</i>
MR. JORDAN	<i>Sidney Blackmer</i>	RADIO ANNOUNCER	
AMES	<i>Richard Temple</i>		<i>Robert Caldwell</i>
TONY ABBOTT	<i>Hal Conklin</i>	LEFTY	<i>Richard Taber</i>
JULIA FARNSWORTH	<i>Fay Baker</i>	TRAINER	<i>Michael Lewin</i>
BETTE LOGAN	<i>Frances Waller</i>	HANDLER	<i>Stephen Elliott</i>
A WORKMAN	<i>Carmen Costi</i>	DOCTOR	<i>Robert Caldwell</i>

**SYNOPSIS:** Act I. Scene 1. *Somewhere in space.* Scene 2. *The Farnsworth drawing-room.* Scene 3. *The same. Next morning.* Act II. Scene 1. *The same. Three weeks later.* Scene 2. *The same. A week later.* Scene 3. *A dressing-room underneath the stadium.*

Director: *Frank Emmons Brown.*

THE BILL is still another treatment of the exchanged souls and bodies theme, familiar in plays from the *Double Exposure* of some thirty seasons ago to such as the *If I Were You*, etc., of more recent years. The present treatment does the old patient even less good than any of the former. The difficulty with the theme on the stage seems to be that, once the idea is established, the entertainment value in it gradually wears itself out struggling against an intrinsic and almost unavoidable repetitiousness, with the consequence that gags have to be injected into it to give it a semblance of life. The gags on this occasion, involving references to Houdini and such supernatural adaptations of mundane cracks as "out of this world," do not happen to be nearly stimulating enough, and the play droops and quickly expires.

The plot variation this time has the soul of a prize-fighter, who has been committed to the hereafter ahead of schedule, transferred to the body of a murdered millionaire. The action consists in the usual consternations brought about by mistaken identity and the customary confusions of the rest of the cast when brought into contact with the soul transferee. Not absent also are the characters from the beyond who are supposed to be invisible to the earthly. If at least two of the former had ingeniously been left to the audience's imagination and had been spared physical presence, the pair of scenes in which they most largely figure might have assisted the presently fancy-less play, since little has ever tickled an audience more than vividly imagining that it sees a creature who is not visible to it. The trick, when practised by an apt playwright, has so far as I know seldom failed to gratify the consumers. Barrie used it to endless prosperity in the case of Tinker Bell in *Peter Pan*. Roland West employed it profitably in the instance of the invisible avenger in *The Unknown Purple*. Lew Wallace and his collaborator merchanted it with huge success years before in the case of the Saviour in *Ben Hur*. The Cowans fascinated audiences with it, also in the matter of the Saviour, in *Family Portrait*. The snooping Minerva in *The Fatal Weakness* and Hickey's wife in *The Iceman Cometh* are more real in the imagination of the audience than some of the characters who are presented in the flesh. And the same was true of the complaining mother-in-law in *Snafu*.

There are many other examples: the invisible figure of Death in Maeterlinck's *The Intruder*, the Napoleon who never appears in person in either *The Duchess Of Elba* or *His Majesty's Levee*, the characters George and Margaret in the English comedy of that name, the device as employed by Jean-Jacques Bernard in *Invitation To A Voyage*, the invisible figure in the doorway at the conclusion of W. W. Jacobs' *The Monkey's Paw*, the beleaguered soldier in *A Sound Of Hunting*, and, of course, the rabbit in *Harvey*. As everyone knows by this time, when the latter was actually shown at a single performance during the

Boston tryout period, the play fell flat; when it was thereafter left to the audience's imagination, the play became one of the biggest hits of its generation.

Pondering the matter several years ago, I wondered why, if a single invisible actor is so appealing, an even greater, aye, world-beating, appeal might not be achieved by making all the actors invisible. About to dismiss the notion as perhaps too extreme, I reflected and came to a supplementary conclusion. Maybe, I said to myself, the notion isn't after all quite so crazy as it sounds. If in one period of theatrical history actors were replaced by marionettes, why not eliminate the marionettes as well and replace them in turn, as in the case of Tinker Bell, with lights? If a simple little disc of light fluttering weakly about the stage could cause an audience to clap and cheer wildly on behalf of the mortally ill Tinker's recovery, why might not a dozen such vari-colored lights under the wand of a skilful dramatist conceivably induce in it all kinds of provocative reactions?

I can see in my mind's eye, for example, a heroine represented by a white light, her husband by a blue, her hopeful lover by a red, and other characters by lights of other shades. The scene showing the heroine wearying of her lawful spouse and the red light gradually and significantly being intermingled with the blue and turning into the purple of romantic passion might be something. And so with the later scene in which the purple, operated on by the green light representing the lover's jealous former mistress, turns finally, with chromatic dramatic license, into bounder yellow.

There are various other ways, aside from lights, that might promote an actorless stage into the full-flowered imagination of the audience. At their worst, they would at least provide the imagination, presently so starved and thirsty, with food and drink that it can not find in actors posturing vainly as human beings and spouting such dialogue as often spreads its deadly pall over the stage.

Literality, as we all too well appreciate, is the bane of the larger portion of our present drama. In the motion

pictures such literality is called for, since their heterogeneous audiences with, according to the picture people themselves, an intelligence quotient of eleven percent, must necessarily have their imaginations chalked up for them on a blackboard. But to believe, as many playwrights and producers evidently do, that in the theatre it is similarly necessary to spell out *This-is-a-cow* lest the audience occasionally mistake it for the leading woman — to believe that is to woo the storehouse. Yet the *This-is-a-cow* drama nevertheless shows up amongst us pretty regularly. And when it does not show up in exactly that form there is still a plentiful share of the two-syllable kind. We don't ask that roses grow on dumps. All we ask is that the dumps don't smell quite so much.

In place of such fancy-choking stuff with its unfortunate actors, let us have another swig of the Harvey liqueur and grant the imagination of the ticket-buyers a little free play. How about, for instance, an actorless stage given over completely to sound? Take, say, the theme of some such exhibit as Andreyev's *The Life Of Man*, which in terms of actors and dialogue traces the story of mankind from birth to death. Let the curtain go up on an empty stage with dawn beginning faintly to show. The sobs of a mother in child-birth are heard, and from that point on sounds picture the progress of the infant through childhood, youth, middle age, old age and finally, with night falling upon the scene, unto death. Rattles and toys, school bells and scratching slates, merry-go-round and picnic laughter and the clash of bats and baseballs, music and the shuffle of dancing feet, the rustle of leaves in the Springtime and the sighs of love, the college cheers and the football songs, the droning of professorial voices, the world of trade with its clattering typewriters and banging machines, the Wedding March, the recognizable various sounds of a family household, the gradual crackling out of the fireplace, and eventually the setting sun and the falling of dark and the church organ of the Reaper. Very sketchily and crudely outlined, but you get the idea: a panorama of the sounds that accompany man from the

cradle to the grave. In the hands of someone who knows how to handle the stage it might possibly make for an imaginative evening.

We surely have outgrown the elementary theatrical day when we have to be shown everything. We have, the most of us, progressed from A B C to at least D E F. Yet what we most frequently get is still A B C. Like eager little children we sit at the knee of drama and excitedly ask it to tell us about the moon, and it answers us with a joke about Kate Smith's posterior. We beg it to satisfy our fancies about the wonders of the loves of princesses and kings, and it tells us stories of alley cats. We urge it to bounce our imaginations with tales of golden heroism and derring-do, and it tells us only of waterfront street-walkers, promiscuous wives, and pornographic schools for brides. Can't we again have a trace of the imagination that has sung to us in the plays of such men as Synge and Yeats, Stephen Phillips and the Shaw of *Caesar And Cleopatra*, Chekhov and Hauptmann, Rostand and O'Casey and Sierrra, and even that bad boy of the drama, W. Saroyan?

Returning finally to the Segall play, we observe only and merely yet another paraphrase of paraphrased feeble imaginations of the stage of yesterday. And we observe also, in theatrical presentation, some of the worst acting, notably that of Donald Murphy and Fay Baker, seen hereabout in some time. And, to boot, some of the worst stage settings, by Raymond Sovey, and some of the worst direction.

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## LOVELY ME. DECEMBER 25, 1946

*A farce-comedy by Jaqueline Susann and Beatrice Cole, with songs by Jeff Bailey and Arthur Siegel. Produced by David Lowe for 37 performances in, initially, the Adelphi Theatre.*

### PROGRAM

IRVING	Arthur Siegel	MR. FORREST	Houston Richards
AUNTIE	Barbara Bulgakov	THOMAS VAN STOKES	
PEGGY SMITH	June Dayton		Reynolds Evans
MATILDA	Joyce Allan	STANISLAUS STANISLAVSKY	
SONNY	Paul Marlin		Mischa Auer
NATASHA SMITH	Luba Malina	MIKE SHANE	Millard Mitchell

**SYNOPSIS:** *The scene is the living-room of Natasha Smith's hotel apartment on Central Park South, New York City. Act I. October, 1946. Act II. Scene 1. Three days later. Scene 2. Late that night. Act III. The following morning.*

Director: Jessie Royce Landis.

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**N**O NEED TO LINGER long over this turkey raffle. It was such a miscarriage on its road tryout under the title, *The Temporary Mrs. Smith*, that several reviewers who were invited to attend its birth pangs firmly counseled its then producer, Vinton Freedley, to get out from under as soon as he could, which he did. Taking over in his place, Mr. Lowe, deprived of such fatherly advice, saw fit to gamble on a metropolitan hearing but tried to play safe by opening his property (to employ a euphemism) on Christmas night, when two earlier announced openings would claim the attention of the first and second-string newspaper reviewers and when there would be assigned to him either the third-stringers or draftees from among the copy boys and girls who might be expected to be dumb and soft of heart. Alas for expectations, however, the latter turned out to be both intelligent and tough, and the play got its desserts.

Manufactured with a pair of rusty hammers smeared with grime, the affair has to do with a Russian family headed maternally by a four times married and hard up night club singer who hopes to make ends meet by taking on a fifth and opulent mate and whose plan is interrupted by the nocturnal appearance of two earlier husbands, in pajamas, of course. The humor is sub-vaudeville; the acting of the leading roles was of a bad musical comedy brand; and the direction loud if not funny.

## BEGGAR'S HOLIDAY. DECEMBER 26, 1946

*A musical comedy based on John Gay's The Beggar's Opera, with book and lyrics by John Latouche and score by Duke Ellington. Produced by Perry Watkins and John R. Sheppard, Jr., for 108 performances in the Broadway Theatre.*

### PROGRAM

MACHEATH	Alfred Drake	MRS. PEACHUM	Dorothy Johnson
THE COCOA GIRL	Marie Bryant	HAMILTON PEACHUM	Zero Mostel
JENNY	Bernice Parks	CHIEF LOCKIT	Rollin Smith
DOLLY TRULL	Lavina Nielsen	LUCY LOCKIT	Mildred Smith
A DRUNK	Lewis Charles	BLINKINSOP	Pan Theodore
BARTENDER	Herbert Ross	THE GIRL	Marjorie Belle
CARELESS LOVE	Avon Long	THE BOY	Paul Godkin
POLLY PEACHUM	Jet MacDonald		
BLACK MARKETEE	Gordon Nelson		

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Scene 1. *Exterior of Miss Jenny's.* Scene 2. *Interior of Miss Jenny's.* Scene 3. *Exterior of Miss Jenny's.* Scene 4. *At Hamilton Peachum's.* Scene 5. *A street.* Scene 6. *A hobo jungle, two days later.* Act II. Scene 1. *The street.* Scene 2. *Chief Lockit's office.* Scene 3. *The jail.* Scene 4. *The street.* Scene 5. *Jenny's bedroom.* Scene 6. *Under the bridge.* Scene 7. *Finale.*

Directors: John Houseman, George Abbott, and Nicholas Ray.

THERE IS A GOOD SHOW in the bag and baggage, but it does not come out. A number of the makings and some of the people to make the good show are hanging around in the background but someone has failed to take the proper advantage of them. The result is a half-cooked exhibit with a few palatable items and with more that called for greater attention from the chef.

Even were the rest of the evening what it should be, I fear, however, that my enjoyment of it would be somewhat impaired by the presence in its leading comedian role of Mr. Zero Mostel. It may be that my taste in comedians



needs some further education but, if that is true, I am afraid it is going to take a couple of colleges to bring me to the point of appreciating Zero. I know, or I should say I have been told, that there are some people who esteem this Zero as the funniest thing seen on the stage since Lou Tellegen. Yet there I sit and watch and listen to him generously straining every nerve to make me laugh and nary a symptom of a cackle comes out of me. It isn't that I in turn haven't generously tried to let him amuse me. I have tried even harder than he tries, which is a lot of trying any way you look at it. But no go. Zero, so far as I am concerned, is morbid. To me, his sole claim to comic eminence lies in the theory that any fat man is *ipso facto* a riot. It is a theory seemingly still held by certain producers, if by no one who knows anything about the theatre. In the last seventy-odd years' history of that theatre it has been a rare fat boy who has laid them in the aisles. The majority of the successful comics may on the other hand not always have been exactly Cassiuses, but they have been far from lard tubs, and often on the scanty side. You don't believe it? Then what of Dan Daly, Raymond Hitchcock, Tom Seabrooke, Harry Watson, Jr., Willis Sweatnam, Fred Stone, Dave Warfield, Joe Cawthorne, Bobby Clark, Charlie Bigelow, James Blakeley, Lew Fields, Joe Weber, Richard Carle, Jimmie Powers, Gus and Max Rogers, Willie Collier, and Joe Coyne? And what, among many others, of Huntley Wright, Walter Jones, Jeff De Angelis, Eddie Foy, Harry Kelly, Harrigan and Hart, Francis Wilson, Seymour Hicks, McIntyre and Heath, Ted Healy, Ray Bolger, Danny Kaye, Ed Wynn, Willie Howard, Jimmy Durante, Al Jolson, Tom McNaughton, Tom Howard, Harry Bulger, Eddie Cantor, Joe Herbert, W. C. Fields in his best days, Lawrence Grossmith, G. P. Huntley, and the rest?

Maybe Zero should diet.

The fact that it took three different directors to try to get some order into the show's materials is significant of the difficulties that confronted the venture. That none of them fully succeeded may be attributed, first, to a book

that vacillates nervously between satire and conventional musical comedy; secondly, to the necessity for getting a smooth flow into the series of broken scenes; and, thirdly, to the achievement of comedy with an uncomic comedian. It is not that Latouche's book, a paraphrase which transforms Gay's eighteenth century highwaymen into twentieth century gangsters, is a weak one; for all its attempt to sit on two stools, it has some wit and drollery. Nor is it that his lyrics are not satisfactory or that Ellington's score is not pretty good as such scores go these days. It is simply that expert showmanship is largely absent and that what might well have been a much more entertaining evening consequently becomes an only intermittently amusing one. The producers and their backers deserved a better result from their three hundred and twenty-five thousand dollar investment.

The mixing of white and black performers has been accomplished happily. And the performances of Alfred Drake, Marie Bryant as a comically lascivious lady of color, and Mildred Smith, along with settings by Oliver Smith, choreography by Valerie Bettis, and costumes by Walter Florell are considerably above par.

# TOPLITZKY OF NOTRE DAME

DECEMBER 26, 1946

*A musical comedy, with book and lyrics by George Marion, Jr., additional dialogue by Jack Barnett, and music by Sammy Fain. Produced by William Cahn for 60 performances in the Century Theatre.*

## PROGRAM

ARMY ANGEL	Phyllis Lynne	McCORMACK	Gus Van
RECORDING ANGEL		ROGER	Walter Long
	Candace Montgomery	TOPLITZKY	J. Edward Bromberg
LIONEL	Harry Fleer	A GIRL	Betty Jane Watson
ANGELO	Warde Donovan	MAILMAN	Robert Bay
MRS. STRUTT	Doris Patston	LEARY	Frank Marlowe
BETTY	Marion Colby	PATTI	Phyllis Lynne
DODO	Estelle Sloan		

MALE QUARTET: Oliver Boersma, John Frederick, Eugene Kingsley, Chris Overson.

DANCERS: Priscilla Callan, Ann Collins, Helen Devlin, Cece Eames, Jessie Fullum, Joan Kavanagh, Pat Marlowe, Mollie Pearson, Frances Wyman, George Andrew, Gene Banks, Charles Dickson, Casse Jaeger, Thomas Kenny, Anthony Starman, Rodney Strong, Joe Wagner, John Wilkins.

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Prologue. Heaven. Scene 1. Toplitzky's tavern, New York City, a September day. Scene 2. A field on the Jersey shore, late afternoon. Scene 3. Toplitzky's tavern, later that day. Scene 4. Toplitzky's terrace, a late afternoon in October. Act II. Scene 1. Toplitzky's tavern, the day before the big game. Scene 2. Toplitzky's terrace. Evening, same day. Scene 3. Going to the big game. Scene 4. Yankee Stadium. Army-Notre Dame game.

Director: José Ruben.

GEORGE MOORE once derisively observed, "The lot of critics is to be remembered by what they failed to understand." If in the future I am remembered at all, which is bloody unlikely, it will be because I failed to understand why producers are so foolish as to put on, at enormous expense, musical shows that even a blind man could tell

them would not stand the ghost of a chance in retrieving their invested capital. This *Toplitzky Of Notre Dame* was one such. It was all wrong in all departments, the book in particular. The latter's notion of a hefty angel on leave from heaven who is waggled into a place on the Notre Dame football team had possibilities, but not in the hands of Mr. Marion, since all that he got out of it was a brew of muddled and vulgar vaudeville humor. If the producers were fetched by the idea of an angel in connection with Notre Dame and football, they might have got hold of a potentially valid book by throwing the one they had into the wastebasket and buying the rights to Upton Sinclair's novel, *Our Lady*, published in 1938, which develops the idea in a different manner, and with a sensitive and cajoling fancy.

I am not going to waste your time discussing everything else, notably the so-called music, that was askew with the show, except, with your indulgence, for one item. That was the looks of the girls. I appreciate that there are critics too superior to stoop to any such subject, but your darling isn't one of them. If he can't have talent, as in this case, the looks are pretty important to him. In fact, they are pretty important to him, he confesses, even when the talent is there. As he sees it, good-looking girls are as necessary a part of a musical show as any other attractive feature, maybe even more so. And when he gets not only no talent but no lookers, as here, he may not be described as a contented man.

*Toplitzky*, however, was not alone in the sombre shortcoming. The ladies in the musicals thus far in the season, with negligible exception, were blood-curdling. Mary Healy and an unidentifiable plum in the chorus of *Around The World* were all right. Helena Bliss, returned in *Gypsy Lady*, was that and more. Leonora Corbett in *Park Avenue* was not exactly an eyesore. Leila Ernst in *If The Shoe Fits* was pretty enough to satisfy the late H. G. Wells, a connoisseur. And Mildred Smith in *Beggar's Holiday* could be looked at very comfortably. But beyond these, in these and other shows like *Yours Is My Heart* and

*Naughty-Naught*, there was not, unless I am losing my eyesight, imagination and health, anything in the feminine line to inspire even an Atlantic City beach sand portraitist.

The season up to this point, indeed, was unusually sparse in eye-masseuses not only in these musicals but in other directions. Aside from the Misses Ward and Bergman earlier noted, there were, in fact, but four female mortals blessed in varying degree by the angels: Beatrice Pearson, who succeeded to the leading role in *The Voice Of The Turtle*, Margaret Leighton in the Old Vic company, Lorraine Miller in *Happy Birthday*, and Jennifer Howard in *The Fatal Weakness*. And to think that it was only a season or two ago that I took my clientèle into my confidence with the report of a dinner in the March of that year with one of the most distinguished members of the Harvard faculty during the middle of which my august companion abruptly pushed aside his plate and, scarcely apropos of the Brazilian politics we had been discussing, exclaimed no less inapplicably, "No more of this nonsense about the nuances of dramatic art! What about the looks of the girls this year?"

Observing my pained expression, he continued: "After all, a stage, particularly a stage with nothing important in the way of musical comedy or drama, that hasn't pretty girls on it as some recompense might just as well, in the language of my Yale colleagues, faw down and go boom."

The season's stage, I had the honor to apprise my brainy friend, had not been lacking in the recompense. It had, quite aside from a consideration of talent or lack of it, offered the spectacle of any number of harmonious young creatures.

"Names, names!" he ordered, getting out his fountain pen.

Drawing such a deep breath that it sucked up four asparagus from the table, I proceeded:

"Lillian Andersen, who came to view in *La Vie Parisienne*, is in the apricots with marshmallow sauce tradition of the beautiful Irene Bentley of your youth. Helena

Bliss, in *Song Of Norway*, has a darker loveliness that will remind you of *profiterolles au chocolat* served on a Swiss music box. Mary Roche, in *The Seven Lively Arts*, is one of the likeliest blondes on the musical stage since Ziegfeld's prime; and in the same show there's a brown-haired girl named Nan Wynn for whom Keats would have stolen extra paper to write poems to."

"More!" bade my friend.

"Janet Tyler, in *Harvey*, should make you regret all the many years you've wasted trying to take your Harvard students' minds off girls like Janet Tyler; and Virginia Gilmore, in *Dear Ruth*, would have changed the late George Apley's attitude before you could say A. Lawrence Lowell. In even the otherwise odious *School For Brides* there's a saucy dark package named Yolande Donlan who has numerous points to recommend her; and in *Follow The Girls* you will observe a youngster, by name Geraldine Stroock, who makes the hypothetically beautiful show girls look in comparison like Ed Dunkhorst."

"Most interesting," allowed my friend. "Pray continue."

"In the catastrophe called *Rhapsody* there was a bonny bundle named Gloria Story who materially lessened the evening's agony; and in another catastrophe called *Sophie* was a girl, Marguerite Clifton, who would have busted up your classes before you had a chance to get out your spectacles. To say nothing, in *Mexican Hayride*, of a little Latin blossom named Eva Reyes and, in *Laffing Room Only*, of a gay, blonde, dancing girl who, if I deciphered the program correctly, answers to the name of Frances Henderson."

"Don't stop," urged my scholarly companion.

"*Up In Central Park* contains at least three young ladies bordering closely on lulus: Dalma Byron, Elaine Barry, and a girl with sarsaparilla hair and marijuana eyes whose name I couldn't extricate from the confusing playbill. And it wouldn't do you any harm, Professor, while you're about it, to have a look at Betty Caulfield and Carolyn Wall in *Kiss And Tell*. Moreover, there was a girl in the late *Signature!* who was hardly to be sniffed

at: Marjorie Lord, a refugee from Hollywood. Even one or two of the married critics, I observed, had that look when Marjorie showed up on the stage which is more usually reserved for a big Porterhouse steak with onions."

"On with the catalogue!" beseeched my friend.

"Irene Hervey, another fugitive from Hollywood, made even *No Way Out* endurable when she turned on her decorativeness. Lois Wheeler, who resembles a young cross between Katharine Cornell and Sylvia Sidney, adorned the stage in *Trio*. And in the non-stop *Oklahoma!* Evelyn Wyckoff brings to that stage the embellishment that the originator of the role, Joan Roberts, didn't. I probably needn't tell you of Betty Field, who again shines so attractively in *The Voice of The Turtle* or of Jane Wyatt, in *Hope For The Best*, who lately returned from the California movie mills; you have doubtless appreciated their seemliness in the past; but I'll tell you anyway."

"And?" eagerly breathed my vis-à-vis.

"And June Havoc in *Sadie Thompson*, blonde as Pilsner in the sunlight, though hardly as cooling. And, in the dreadful rubbish *Down To Miami*, a girl named Elaine Ellis who suggested an orangeade in a pale blue veil."

"A nutritious list," observed my professorial friend. "Is that all?"

"Certainly not," I glowered. "Joan Tetzel, in *I Remember Mama*, makes one think of Central Park on a breezy Spring morning. Carole Landis, from the land of technicolor hamburgers, chlorine swimming pools and ethyl alcohol-propelled automobiles, brings to *A Lady Says Yes* a dazzle of face and figure that mercifully blots out not only some of the most hideous scenery this side of Flushing, but also a stageful of women enough to scare the hell out of you. This Carole may not be anything to make you forget Bessie McCoy, or Marilyn Miller, or for that matter even Bonnie Maginn, but she looks as if she had been born in a champagne bottle with a tambourine for a godmother, which, in this ice-water world, you will agree is something."

"Don't let me interrupt," my friend pleaded.

"In *Snafu* there's a cute one named Bethel Leslie who, while perhaps nothing to drive Vivien Leigh into abashed hiding, is not at all hard on the eyes; and in *Hats Off To Ice* I take the liberty of bringing to your notice a chickadee, by name Pat Marshall, who — if the blue and purple lights, which they idiotically throw on her most of the time while she is singing, do not deceive me — is a bijou of considerable lustre. Let alone, in *The Tempest*, the comely Frances Heflin, and, in the recently evacuated turkey called *And Be My Love*, a youthful newcomer named Ruth Homond who was to be surveyed with plenty of satisfaction. And while I still have my breath, don't overlook Hilda Simms in *Anna Lucasta*, whom John Gunther in the luxurious style of his novel *The Troubled Midnight* would describe as 'looking like strong coffee lifted from the cup in a silver spoon' but whom I shall content myself rather with describing as a very sightly colored girl. To say nothing of the little parcel, Susana Garnett, in *Little Women*, or of Jean Gillespie in *Chicken Every Sunday*."

"Any more?" solicitously inquired my friend.

"The season still has all of three more months to go," I reminded him.

"Waiter," he yelled, "a telegraph blank, quick!"

"A telegraph blank?" I speculated.

"I am resigning from the faculty," he whispered.



# TEMPER THE WIND. DECEMBER 27, 1946

*A play by Edward Mabley and Leonard Mins. Produced by Barnard Straus and Roland Haas for 35 performances in the Playhouse.*

## PROGRAM

SOPHIE VON GUTZKOW	LT. COL. RICHARD WOODRUFF
Blanche Yurka	Thomas Beck
TRUDI	HEINRICH LINDAU
Charlotte London	Martin Brandt
ELISABETH JAEGER	CAPT. KAREL PALIVEC
Vilma Kurer	Herbert Berghof
HUGO BENCKENDORFF	SGT. EDWARD GREEN
Reinhold Schunzel	Paul Tripp
THEODORE BRUCE	LT. JAMES HARRIS
Walter Greaza	Albert Patterson
CPL. TOM HUTCHINSON	LT. FRANK DANIELS
George Mathews	Michael Sivy
ERICH JAEGER	Tonio Selwart

**SYNOPSIS:** *The action takes place in the small manufacturing town of Reitenberg in northeastern Bavaria. The time is the present. Act I. Living-room of the Benckendorff house. Monday afternoon. Act II. Scene 1. American garrison headquarters. Wednesday afternoon. Scene 2. The Benckendorff house. Thursday afternoon. Act III. Scene 1. Garrison headquarters. Friday evening. Scene 2. The Benckendorff house. Early Saturday morning.*

Director: *Reginald Denham.*

I AM A BAD AUDIENCE for playwrights who have messages and who deliver them in too indignant a tone. The messages I am willing politely to listen to and possibly on occasion even applaud, if not as a critic of the dramatic art at least in my capacity as an upright citizen. It is the indignation that I can not swallow. When it is discharged with undue violence at whichever character is chosen by the playwright to represent the other side of his argument, my parlor manners and sportsmanship are such that they cause me not only to sympathize with the sin-of-a-pooch but even at times to wish he might get the better of the prosecution. I suppose that it is morally reprehensible, but I can't help it. A too loud voice, a too heated denun-

ciation, and I am not merely for the underdog but ready to set him up to a couple of pounds of the kind of meat he likes best.

It is for this reason that a play like this *Temper The Wind* does not affect me quite as it should. I agree with its authors that to allow the factories that contributed to the Nazi war machine to go back into business might not be the wisest course to pursue. I also agree that the former cartels participated in by American trade interests were not particularly desirable. I further agree that the Junker promoters of war should not gratefully be provided with free strawberry sundaes and macaroons to fire them with a renewed ebullience. So much for my attitude as one who, at his advanced age, prefers peace in the world to adventurous bloodshed. But, as one who is not hired for his views on such matters but rather primarily for his views on drama, I fail to agree that the best way to convey these ideas is to make their spokesman, a young American lieutenant-colonel representing the Allied Military Government, the kind of smug and self-satisfied character that intelligent heroines always kick out of the house in farce-comedies like *Dear Ruth*, with the full and even enthusiastic approval of the audience.

It was, as most people know by now, the device of the late William Gillette successfully to gain sympathy for himself as the hero of his melodramas by having the villain or villains bellow and roar while he conducted himself in a relatively unruffled manner. The present playwrights and their director might have profited from his lesson. While their villains do not exactly raise the roof yet nevertheless make noise enough, their hero has at them with an elocutionary timbre scarcely suited to a confidential tête-à-tête and so becomes quite as objectionable, even to a patriot with several drinks under his belt. Moreover, looking things coldly and impartially in the eye, which is the privilege of any critic this side of Moscow, the hero's arguments viewed purely as arguments do not strike me as any more logical than the villains'. In sober truth, the latter's seem somewhat the sounder, since, unlike the

hero's, they are more greatly based on practicality and intellect than on visions and emotion.

If all that the authors wrote was a confessed topical melodrama, none of this, of course, would much count against them. But that they intend their play to be accepted as more substantial drama is plain, and for that reason it falls far short of its purpose. Its war factory overlord, its female advocate of German supremacy, and its unrepentant Nazi are out of the general sort of exhibit that occupied the 10-20-30 stages in the days of the Spanish-American war and over which the French grew hysterically excited during World War I. And its heroic American is essentially much the same character at whom the more ribald boys in the old peanut galleries used to shout "Oh you kid!", to the accompaniment of beer bottle stoppers.

The acting does not call for comment except in the case of Reinhold Schunzel as the villainous factory boss, and the comment there is that the evening's most meritorious performance, doubtless to the authors' private embarrassment, is contributed by a one-time citizen of the denounced enemy nation.

Like *Wonderful Journey*, the play made a considerable impression when it was produced in the Woodstock, New York, little summer theatre, which only goes to prove once again what was noted in an earlier chapter.

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## LOVE GOES TO PRESS. JANUARY 1, 1947

*A comedy by Martha Gellhorn and Virginia Cowles. Produced by Warren P. Munsel and Herman Bernstein for 5 performances in the Biltmore Theatre.*

### PROGRAM

LEONARD LIGHTFOOT (INTERNATIONAL INFORMATION AGENCY) <i>Gerald Andersen</i>	CORPORAL CRAMP <i>Peter Bennett</i>
TEX CROWDER (UNION PRESS) <i>David Tyrrell</i>	DAPHNE RUTHERFORD (E.N.S.A.) <i>Georgina Cookson</i>
HANK O'REILLY (ALLIANCE PRESS) <i>Warren Parker</i>	JANE MASON (NEW YORK BULLETIN) <i>Joyce Heron</i>
JOE ROGERS (SAN FRANCISCO DISPATCH) <i>William Post, Jr.</i>	ANNABELLE JONES (SAN FRANCISCO WORLD) <i>Jane Middleton</i>
MAJOR PHILLIP BROOKE-JERVAUX (PUBLIC RELATIONS OFFICER) <i>Ralph Michael</i>	MAJOR DICK HAWKINS (U.S.A.A.F.) <i>Don Gibson</i>
BY SPECIAL PERMISSION OF EALING STUDIOS, LTD.	CAPTAIN SIR ALASTAIR DRAKE (CONDUCTING OFFICER) <i>Nigel Neilson</i>

SYNOPSIS: *Italy. February, 1944. Act I. Allied Press Camp, Pogibonsi. Late afternoon. Act II. Scene 1. A bedroom, Press Camp. The next morning. Scene 2. Press Camp. Early afternoon the same day. Act III. Press Camp, the following morning.*

Director: *Wallace Douglas.*

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THE EVENING got off to a bad start on its title alone. If anything more girlishly coy than *Love Goes To Press* has been attached to a play in some years, I must have been being fitted for new glasses at the time and missed it. I am no more against love than, as I confessed a few chapters back, I am against kisses, being a liberal-minded man, but while kisses may serve occasionally in play titles without grave harm, love generally appears to have a way of making them seem sickly silly. *Kiss The Boys Goodbye*, *Kiss And Tell*, even, odzooks, *A Kiss For Cinderella*, may be digested without too much pain, albeit something like *The*

*Soul Kiss* is good for a severe attack of cramps. But when it comes to love — and it seems to come pretty regularly — it takes a strong man to look at a theatre marquee without gagging.

*The Love Call, Love Is Like That, The Love Liar, The Love Thief, and Love In A Mist* are enough to drive even the most determined ticket purchaser into the nearest gin-mill for a recuperative snifter. *The Love Duel, The Love Habit, Love On Account, Love And The Man, and Love's Lottery* can be swallowed only with a gallon of 192-proof bourbon. *The Love Match, Love — And What Then?, The Love Path, Love's Pilgrimage, and Love Watches* call for two gallons, at least. And *The Love City, Love's Labour's Lost, The Love Expert, Love Is The Best Doctor, The Love Tiff, Love's Metamorphosis, Love In A Wood, and Love Adorns*, whatever the quality of the plays they herald, come near to turning the stoutest stomach. Nine times out of ten, moreover, they and all the others like them are never too lucky at the box-office. Love and electric lights don't go so well together, as if everybody but theatrical producers didn't know it.

Title or no title, however, this *Love Goes To Press* is a dreary business. What its authors evidently tried to write was a masculine satirical comedy describing the adventures of a couple of war correspondents like themselves with correspondents of the male species and various military gents on the Italian front in 1944. What they have written is a femininely sentimental affair in which a pair of love stories horn disastrously into their blueprint and give to the whole the air of a feeble bedroom comedy without the bedroom. Their attempts to lampoon their male reportorial counterparts are particularly unfortunate, since in the lampooning they succeed only in achieving a boomerang lampoon of their theoretically superior females. There surely are rich travesty opportunities in the legion of males who inserted themselves into nobby correspondents' uniforms in the late war and, with minor honorable exception, tried to gain a Richard Harding Davis glamour and eminence for themselves with only a Galla-

gher equipment. But the girls have missed all of them. They might have profited from a reading of the novels of J. P. Marquand and Sinclair Lewis, who have succeeded in picturing handsomely in a few paragraphs what they have failed to in all of two and a half hours.

Both Miss Gellhorn and Miss Cowles served personally as war correspondents but, so far as their play deals with war and correspondents, they might every bit as well have stayed at home, gone around to Samuel T. French's, and bought copies of the late Raymond Hitchcock's forty-year-old vehicle *The Galloper* and its music show derivation, *A Yankee Tourist*, both by the Davis aforesaid. In them they would have found hints of the comedy materials they did not find at first hand, and of the way to treat them, and possibly a play with all the humor and amusement that theirs lacks.

The acting by a part English, part American company did not materially encourage the evening; and the direction by Wallace Douglas, who staged the play in London and who was imported for the same service here, did not in turn materially assist either the actors or the script.

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## BLOOMER GIRL. JANUARY 6, 1947

*A return engagement of the musical comedy by Sig Herzig and Fred Saidy, with music by Harold Arlen and lyrics by E. Y. Harburg. Produced by John C. Wilson and Nat Goldstone for 48 performances in the City Center Theatre.*

## PRINCIPALS

Nanette Fabray, Dick Smart, Peggy Campbell, Hubert Dilworth, Olive Reeves-Smith, Mabel Taliaferro, Matt Briggs, and John Call.

Director: E. Y. Harburg.

THE CITY CENTER playhouse, humorists will recall, was inaugurated by the municipality several years ago to present at popular prices "the best in drama and music." It here presented as its sole theatrical offering of the season that combination of what is finest in drama and music, this stale, two-year-old Broadway song and dance show. It accordingly plunged still farther, if that is possible, into the discard as a civic or any other kind of enterprise interested in the theatre.

Just how the playhouse has lately been operating and who is really responsible for it is only vaguely determinable. That is, except for the fact that Paul Moss, erstwhile municipal censor of strip-teasers and plays treating of subjects which he didn't like, seems to be hanging around in some capacity or other. But one thing is certain: whoever is running the place is the wrong person for the job. If it is to continue as it is, the least that should be done is frankly and openly to announce that its original high purpose as to drama has been thrown down the drain and that it will book anything at all in a theatrical line, however shoddy, that it can get. Having honestly confessed as much, it may then again contentedly fall back on its programs of tap dancers, harmonica players, puppet shows,

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dog acts and other such of its later contributions to the municipality's dramatic culture and glory.

Those who have forgotten the exalted nature of *Bloomer Girl* may refresh their memories by referring to *The Theatre Book Of The Year* for the 1944-1945 season.



## THE BIG TWO. JANUARY 8, 1947

*A play by Ladislaus Bush-Fekete and Mary Helen Fay.  
Produced by Elliott Nugent and Robert Montgomery for  
21 performances in the Booth Theatre.*

### PROGRAM

KARL	Martin Berliner	FRAULEIN BERGER	Olga Fabian
MEISSL	Eduard Franz	SERGEANT KULIKOFF	
CORP. PAT MCCLURE	Robert Scott		Mischa Tonken
GWENDOLYN	Wauna Paul		Phil Miller
DANIELLE FORBES	Claire Trevor		Zita Rieth
MOSER	E. A. Krumschmidt	GUESTS	Kenneth Dobbs
WIRTEH	John Banner		Fred Lorenz
PLATSCHEK	Felix Bressart		Marc Hamilton
CAPTAIN NICHOLAI MOSGOVOY		RUSSIAN	Walter Palance
	Philip Dorn	SOLDIERS	Charles Boaz, Jr.

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Late afternoon. Act II. Scene 1. Next morning.  
Scene 2. Evening of the same day. Act III. Thirty minutes later.

The place. The lobby of the Waldhotel in Baden, within Russian  
occupied zone of Austria near Vienna. Time. November, 1945.

Director: Robert Montgomery.

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I FEAR THAT Mr. Bush-Fekete and his good wife, Miss Fay, whether operating singly or in collaboration do not figure among the playwrights who are close to my bosom. In the last eight or nine years one or both of them have unloaded some pretty inconsiderate evenings on me: *The Lady Has A Heart*, *Embezzled Heaven*, and *Alice In Arms*, to say nothing of the play from which *Ladies And Gentlemen* was derived. Noted for my open and hospitable mind, I nevertheless contributed my presence to this latest of their efforts on the chance that they might conceivably at last show something a bit worth while. And I am right here to state that my open and hospitable mind got another good beating for its pains. Their newest gobbler is headed straight back to the movies from which they have taken another brief holiday. Whether it will or will not

make a screen classic, I do not know. All I know is that as a play it is strictly in a class with their other attempts to write for the theatre. Its plot of a beautiful American girl correspondent in a Russian occupied town in Austria and on the trail of a renegade American radio commentator, together with her amorous relations with a beautiful Russian officer torn between love and duty, may be meat for the movies but it and its literary and dramaturgical execution make it scrapple for the stage.

The leading roles were acted by two Hollywood recruits, Claire Trevor and Philip Dorn. They will doubtless be O.K. in the picture version.

I am sometimes, I hear, accused of prejudice against these Hollywood writers. If it is true and if I am prejudiced, it is only because the record leaves me no other course. The plays, aside from this one, which have been contributed by the aforesaid to the present season have been the following: *Swan Song*, *Second Best Bed*, *The Dancer*, *A Flag Is Born*, *The Bees And The Flowers*, *Mr. Peebles And Mr. Hooker*, *Loco*, *Made In Heaven*, *Happy Birthday*, *The Haven*, *Wonderful Journey*, and *John Loves Mary*. And the shows have been *Around The World* and, in part, *Park Avenue*. If critical objection to them constitutes arbitrary prejudice, I plead guilty. But I think it would take a packed Hollywood jury to convict me, and one, at that, without a Hollywood playwright like Garson Kanin on it.

As a sufficient sample of the dramatic wit of these two latest movie intruders, we get a play which raises its curtain on such stuff as having a pair of male characters elaborately engage in the German and Russian languages which they find unintelligible and, after a considerable spell of painful headscratching, announce that both can speak English, followed a few moments later by a female character's remark that she hails from America and a foreigner's query as to whether she knows a Mrs. Brown living there. And as an equally sufficient sample of dramatic line, we have the heroine, upon the hero's challenge of her amorous sincerity, heatedly proclaiming, "All right, strike

me!" the while she fastidiously juggles back into position the décolleté gown which his embrace has mussed up.

In addition to these Hollywood writers, I hear that I am also prejudiced against Hollywood actors who come into the theatre. If anyone who knows the least thing about dramatic acting were to look, for example, at Miss Trevor's efforts in that direction and were to remain still unprejudiced, he would himself have a brilliant career open to him as a movie actor. Mr. Dorn is not as bad, but like so many others of his ilk is persuaded that a cinema camera dead facial expression alternating with the display of a handsome profile is all that is necessary to indicate strong, silent emotion. A few of such Hollywood aspirants to stage kudos show signs of some competence, but for every one who does there are a dozen or more whose possible chances for elevation seem to have been irreparably wrecked on Hollywood's treacherous, golden shoals.

The play appealed so powerfully to the Columbia motion picture company that it laid out before production an advance payment for the screen rights of one hundred thousand dollars plus a guarantee of at least one hundred and fifty thousand more. It also contracted for Mr. Montgomery, the film actor, to duplicate his directorial virtuosity, imperceptible to a theatre audience, on the picture's behalf.

## STREET SCENE. JANUARY 9, 1947

*A "dramatic musical" based on Elmer Rice's play of the same name, with book by Mr. Rice, music by Kurt Weill, and lyrics by Langston Hughes. Produced by Dwight Deere Wiman and the Playwrights' Company for 148 performances in the Adelphi Theatre.*

## PROGRAM

ABRAHAM KAPLAN	STEVE SANKEY	Lauren Gilbert
IRVING KAUFMAN	LIPPO FIORENTINO	Sydney Rayner
GRETA FIORENTINO	JENNIE HILDEBRAND	Beverly Janis
CARL OLSEN	MARY HILDEBRAND	Juliana Gallagher
EMMA JONES	CHARLIE HILDEBRAND	Bennett Burrill
OLGA OLSEN	LAURA HILDEBRAND	Elen Lane
SHIRLEY KAPLAN	GRACE DAVIS	Helen Ferguson
NORMA CHAMBERS	ROSE MAURRANT	Anne Jeffreys
HENRY DAVIS	HARRY EASTER	Don Saxon
CREIGHTON THOMPSON	MAE JONES	Sheila Bond
WILLIE MAURRANT	DICK MCGANN	Danny Daniels
ANNA MAURRANT	VINCENT JONES	Robert Pierson
SAM KAPLAN	DR. JOHN WILSON	Edwin G. O'Connor
DANIEL BUCHANAN		
FRANK MAURRANT		
NORMAN CORDON		
GEORGE JONES	DAVID E. THOMAS	

**SYNOPSIS:** *The action takes place on a sidewalk in New York City. Act I. An evening in June. Act II. Scene 1. The following morning. Scene 2. Afternoon of the same day.*

Director: Charles Friedman.

**F**OR THE FIRST twenty minutes or so, the so-called dramatic musical threatened to be one of those shows which, like some pole-vaulters, have the loftiest of intentions but which, like the pole-vaulters, can not clear the bar and land on their butts. That it might manage the lower elevations but would miss the higher, despite its manifest ambition and determination, along with its heavy breathing, appeared to be pretty certain.

The general idea, one said to one's self, would seem to have been an available one. Rice's eighteen-year-old play of the comedy and tragedy of a New York street of shabby tenements might have in it many of the possibilities of the shabby Catfish Row tenements of the Heywards' old play *Porgy*, from which *Porgy And Bess* was so successfully derived. And surely the sounds and cries of the city streets, like those of Catfish Row, would exercise an understandable appeal to a composer. But those first twenty minutes or so seemed to indicate that the boys had missed the possibilities and that what would result would be simply another pretentious bore.

Having jumped to such a conclusion, what followed, however, caused the skeptic to jump right back again. For what followed the dull and heavy beginning was an approach to American folk opera without the slightest pretentiousness, with an affecting book resolutely handled, with appropriately simple lyrics, with — aside from two honky-tonk compromises — the most satisfactory if still largely hereditary music that Kurt Weill has thus far given us, and with a company of singers much more capable than those usually heard on the theatre stage. And also, to continue the acquired cheer, with a dancing pair, Sheila Bond and Danny Daniels, who, if such lowly lingo may be permitted the occasion, knocked 'em outa their seats, with some kid sidewalk dancing delightful in its artless abandon, and with an over-all drive and pull. To be critically precise, the exhibit may not be first-rate even on its own terms, but it is top-notch second-rate and top-notch second-rate is certainly something not to be sniffed at in these days of so much lower-notch third-rate. Though it overshoots its song, overcrowds dramatically a stage that might well have been set deeper, and here and there briefly resorts to the technique of ordinary musical comedy, it nevertheless in the aggregate makes its dent in intelligent emotion and achieves the mood its fabricators intended.

The company, with minor exception, is in greater part

an excellent one, its smooth composition violated only by Hope Emerson's cheaply obvious imitation of the comedy delivery of Doro Merande, Polyna Stoska's starched stage deportment, though her voice is a good one, and Norman Cordon's even starchier, though in voice he, too, offers no slightest ground for complaint. Anne Jeffreys, in particular, does admirably by the young heroine's role, which statement, since Miss Jeffreys comes from Hollywood and thirty or forty films, would suggest that my alleged Hollywood prejudice is not perceptible when confronted by talent. Charles Friedman's stage direction is extremely able, and Jo Mielziner's original setting of the brownstone tenement, repainted, again serves its purpose.

"A fellow who finances a musical show these days," the experienced Billy Rose lately wrote, "ought to have his head examined. Yesterday I turned down the chance to produce a musical which has all the earmarks of a hit. At today's prices it will cost over two hundred thousand dollars to ring up the curtain. It must gross better than twenty-five thousand dollars a week to pay operating expenses. And that's for an average-sized show without stars, revolving stages or fancy costumes. Is *Show Boat* a good show? Try to think of a better one. The current revival got rave reviews. When it closes next month it will have taken in more than two million dollars and it averaged better than forty thousand dollars a week. Yet it will wind up one hundred and sixty thousand dollars in the red! The mornings after *Are You With It?* and *Billion Dollar Baby* opened, the backers thought they had the key to Fort Knox. The shows played to big business for months. When they folded, the angels had had their wings clipped. Each of these successes lost six figure sugar. *Annie Get Your Gun* isn't a hit, it's an explosion. It cost about three hundred and fifty thousand dollars to produce. It's been grossing forty-five thousand dollars a week for thirty weeks now. If it sells every seat for another thirty, the backers will be exactly even. Remember, these are the figures on hits. For every hit there were at least five turkeys. A con-

servative guess is that two million dollars were dropped on the *Nellie Blys*, *Girl From Nantuckets*, *Around The Worlds*, and a dozen other fumbles."

Since the above was written, of this season's shows *Yours Is My Heart* dropped one hundred and twenty thousand dollars, *Gypsy Lady* was still deep in the red when it was taken on a gamble to London, *Park Avenue* lost one hundred and eighty thousand dollars, *If The Shoe Fits* dropped more than three hundred thousand, *Beggar's Holiday* lost three hundred and twenty-five thousand, *Toplitzky Of Notre Dame* dropped two hundred thousand, and *In Gay New Orleans* closed on the road before daring New York to a loss of more than three hundred thousand.

This *Street Scene* cost one hundred and sixty thousand dollars. But I can not agree with Mr. Rose that its producers ought to have their heads examined. Whether it makes money or loses it, it was worth doing, and some people still like to do things worth doing, even if their doing them lands them within a block of the poor-house.

## FINIAN'S RAINBOW. JANUARY 10, 1947

*A musical fantasy with book by E. Y. Harburg and Fred Saidy, lyrics by Mr. Harburg, and music by Burton Lane. Produced by Lee Sabinson and William R. Katzell for beyond the season performances in the 46th Street Theatre.*

### PROGRAM

SUNNY	Sonny Terry	OG	David Wayne
BUZZ COLLINS	Eddie Bruce	HOWARD	William Greaves
SHERIFF	Tom McElhany	SENATOR BILLBOARD RAWKINS	
SUSAN MAHONEY	Anita Alvarez		Robert Pitkin
HENRY	Augustus Smith, Jr.	DIANE	Diane Woods
FINIAN McLONERGAN		JANE	Jane Earle
	Albert Sharpe	JOHN	Roland Skinner
SHARON McLONERGAN		MR. ROBUST	Arthur Tell
	Ella Logan	MR. SHEARS	Royal Dano
WOODY MAHONEY			
	Donald Richards		

**SYNOPSIS:** Act I. Scene 1. *The Meetin' Place. Rainbow Valley, Misstucky.* Scene 2. *The same, that night.* Scene 3. *The colonial estate of Senator Billboard Rawkins, the next morning.* Scene 4. *The Meetin' Place, following day.* Scene 5. *A path in the woods.* Scene 6. *The Meetin' Place, next morning.* Act II. Scene 1. *Rainbow Valley, a few weeks later.* Scene 2. *A wooded section of the hills.* Scene 3. *The Meetin' Place.* Scene 4. *Just before dawn.*

Director: Bretaigne Windust.

GILBERT OBVIOUSLY wide aside, this is probably in large part the most amusing original musical fantasy book since the last really amusing original one which I am too tired at the moment to dig that far back into my memory to identify, though it may well have been *The Arcadians*. A mixture of Irish folk lore and contemporary American political, sociological and economic phenomena, its wit and humor are addressed to an old Irishman who comes to this country with a magic pot of gold which he has filched from a pursuing leprechaun and to the difficulties he gets into,



all finally resolved when the ground in which he has buried the gold and from which it has been stolen is discovered to be even richer in tobacco soil. "What's the good of gold anyway?" he has previously been comforted. "You can't put mustard on it." Incidental to the gold business; there is a load of waggery involving a southern Senator of the Bilbo stripe who is turned into a Negro, joins up with a quartet of jolly colored singers, and finds that black folk are not as black as he had imagined them; a champion of labor who, himself a laborer, because of the unions' regulations can't get into one and hence can't work; a leprechaun who discovers a realer fairyland in the beautiful females he encounters in America, etc. Even the sentimental passages have humor. When the girl of his heart turns him down, the hero lightly shrugs it off with "What the odds? It's only love." Throughout, a satirical wink seldom fails the occasion. A Tuskegee student who is working his way through college and who tries to get a position as butler with the Senator is instructed that he must always serve juleps with a limp and shuffle since that is the way it is always done in such historical documents as *Gone With The Wind* movies and is reassured that if he does it well he will be certain of a job as a butler after he gets his degree and is out of college. The Irishman says that stealing the pot of gold and burying it in the ground saves a lot of time and work, since other men go to all the trouble of digging it up out of the ground and then paying it over in taxes to the Government which again buries it at Fort Knox. And the main difference between Ireland and America, he allows, is that there are more Irishmen over here.

All this and much more and very much better are figged out with some admirable choreography devised by Michael Kidd, with facetious costumes by Eleanor Goldsmith, with a performance by the imported Irish comedian, Albert Sharpe, that is right out of O'Casey, and with a number of other items to recreate the consumer. The music is on the minus side, being written mainly for the torch larynx or kangaroo feet, yet there are a pair of melo-

dies that are lightly pleasant and, all in all, nothing in the score to get too sulky about. Above everything, however, the occasion is especially welcome in that it prevents the reviewers, including this one, from indulging in the too frequent and tiresome animadversions on the inferiority of music show books in general and of the one under immediate consideration in particular. But if the show had nothing else to recommend it, its several excursions into social consciousness would call for a large ribbon, since not only does it handle the business with an unaccustomed drollery but with an effectiveness scarcely achieved in the many plays boiled by our young radicals and other grouseers, chief among whom are those Hollywood writing boys who have become violently indignant at an existing order which has offensively rewarded their literary incompetences with from five to six thousand dollars a week.

Under the circumstances, it is hard for one to fathom the attitude of those colleagues who have arbitrarily objected to the show's inclusion of what may be called, in an over-all designation of plumbing, bathroom humor. Such humor of that sort which there is, and there is very little, is of a compatible childlike innocence and is further retailed, without the slightest suspicion of snigger, chiefly by a childlike leprechaun character. What may be essentially vulgar in it is thus rid of vulgarity by virtue of its mouthpiece, much as any child's observations on biological curiosæ. Even the Drury Lane Christmas extravaganzas have periodically enjoyed a bit of sport in such directions without complaint. And if anything ever has been more innocent than those kid extravaganzas, except possibly a number of plays by Maeterlinck and George M. Cohan, my education in innocence needs some looking after.

But this is only a roundabout way of getting to what is on my mind. For some reason that skirts my comprehension, you will usually find that the kind of reviewer who inveighs against the faintest indelicacy in a Broadway musical show, however good, is the very same one who affects a critical liberality by condoning a much greater dose in any Broadway dramatic offering, however bad, whose

theme is an even superficially serious one. Just how some low humor becomes unacceptably out of key with a musical comedy and acceptably in key with a more solemn exhibit, I wish someone would explain to me. Yet let any song and dance show, particularly any gaily comical song and dance show, venture a touch of fun about even a baby's diapers and a lofty morality overcomes the reviewer and outrages his sudden accession of decorum. It happens so regularly that, were I a music show book writer, I should hesitate long before risking a modest allusion to even a bathtub.

This whole matter of squeamishness in connection with music shows assumes the aspect of a most touching hypocrisy. When it comes to filth, which is generally of a sexual order, I am all with the complainants. Such smut as has been peddled in musicals like *Hairpin Harmony*, *A Lady Says Yes*, and *The Duchess Misbehaves* is as distasteful to me as to anyone else. But the humor in this *Finian's Rainbow* and some other shows is not of a sex nature; it is not in the least dirty; it is simply funny, naughty-little-boy stuff; and it takes a pretty prig to see in it anything more than that. If it is more than that, all I can say is that I must be a very foul-minded lout who doesn't seem to realize the fact.

There is something else about this and other such shows that I should like to bring up. Whenever one of them includes a lot of particularly gay and spirited dancing, we are sure to read from at least one or two of the colleagues that the grinning chorus girls and boys "seem to be enjoying it just as much as the audience." As recording secretary of the Society For The Prevention Of Bosh, I wish to protest. If anyone has ever seen a chorus boy or chorus girl chuckling fit to bust after spending a couple of hours hoofing his or her head off for a living, I should appreciate it if he would come around some day and give me the evidence for my research files. Or if anyone, even before that time, has ever seen a chorus girl come off the stage after a hard dance number looking as merry as a lark, I should also deeply appreciate it if he would come around with

the other fellow. The dancers in *Finian's Rainbow* have to exert themselves more than in any show we have seen this year. The choreography calls upon them steadily for leaps, bounds, whirls, twirls, jumps, falls on the floor, agitations of the anatomy amounting to epilepsy and other such physical activities more usually associated with wire-haired dogs and trial lawyers. It is quite possible that the dogs and lawyers enjoy them inordinately. But I am full of skepticism that the dancers share entirely an audience's rapt delight in them and are made as joyous by them as they would be by, say, a quiet steak sandwich and glass of beer.

That the show is all of a happy piece would be a considerable exaggeration. There are moments and sometimes minutes when it purveys such humor as a loud noise off stage that is identified by one of the characters as the crack of dawn. There is the kind of lyric which speculates that if necessity is the mother of invention who is the father. There is too much of Miss Logan, with coy and wistful blinking, at stage center. And there are other lapses. But, taken from start to finish, the show is so superior to the common run of light entertainment that finding fault with it is much like finding fault with a charming supper simply because there is a little hole in the napkin.

## LITTLE A. JANUARY 15, 1947

*A play by Hugh White. Produced by Sam Nasser for 21 performances in the Henry Miller Theatre.*

## PROGRAM

AARON STORM	Otto Kruger	PHOEBE PAINTER	Frances Bavier
LUCINDA STORM		CLYDE PAINTER	Harry Mehaffey
	Jessie Royce Landis	DR. DUNCAN BROWN	Wallis Clark
MARY HOWARD	Ottillie Kruger	DONALD STORM	Robert Wiley

**SYNOPSIS:** *The living-room of the Storm home in Rockbridge, a small town in northern California. Act I. Time. The present. About 10 p.m. Act II. Seven p.m. the following evening. Act III. About half an hour later.*

Director: Melville Burke.

THE PLAY is an alumnus of the previous summer's rural theatre circuit and, like various other such alumni, shows need of considerably more schooling before going to work in the big city. The materials for a possibly fair play are there, but they still call for a lot of dramaturgical education. As they stand, they are merely skimmed and seldom even faintly plumbed, and the result is the kind of superficial semi-melodrama that from time to time comes out of the mosquito playhouses wearing the mask of searching drama.

The story is scarcely a novel one. We again have the familiar spineless husband married to a self-seeking and vicious woman of low social station. We have the former's suspicion that their offspring is not of his collaboration but of another's. We have the gradually mounting acrimony, the duelling, and in the end the husband's stern declaration of himself and the ultimate tragedy that was obvious half way through the first act to everyone in the house but the author's admiring relatives and the backers.

It plainly requires a superior dramatist to get more from such a plot than the sort of popgun emotionalism associated with what thirty or more years ago was known

in Broadway circles as "strong stuff." In that period the local stage was rarely without at least one such play which impressed the more susceptible criticism as a powerful work of dramatic art because it was not afraid to deal with illegitimacy, because its heroine for a change was pictured as having some unprepossessing qualities, and because someone shot off a pistol in the last act. The plays, one and all, were obviously inspired by the Continental drama of the preceding years. The only difference was that the European playwrights motivated the plots through more or less profound analyses of character and that their local imitators motivated their pasteboard characters through the plots.

Being a hound for punishment, I must in my time have sat through something like a score or more of the scripts, not one of which was worthy to wipe off even Henri Bataille's spectacles. Their characters may have been called William Worthington, Dr. Louis Blakenstone and Beulah Larchmont, but their names were almost always really William Hurlbut, Louis Anspacher and Beulah Poynter. And we again, after all these years, come upon something like the same situation in this *Little A*. Its hero, programmed Aaron Storm, is our old friend Worthington, alias Walter Hackett; its heroine, programmed Lucinda Storm, is our old girl friend Larchmont, alias Eugenie Walter; and its family counselor, billed as Dr. Duncan Brown, is none other than our old benign neighbor Doc Blakenstone, alias Augustus Thomas.

Now that we have all grown up a bit, it won't, alas, do.

Mr. White's platitudinous writing only adds to the occasion's impossibilities. "You understand music, Mary," observes Aaron to the little housemaid, a relative of Ibsen's Regina destined for attempted rape by the son of the household. "I dream by it. I think on the edge of big things when I listen to music." And the direction and acting multiply the sum. In view of the persistently ubiquitous staleness of the play's characters, theme and execution, a logical title for it would have been *Aaron Go Bragh*.

## IF IN THE GREEN WOOD . . .

JANUARY 16, 1947

*A play in free verse by Victoria Kuhn. Produced by the Blackfriars' Guild for 24 performances in the Blackfriars' Guild Theatre.*

## PROGRAM

ELENA	Katherine Hamilton	PETER CONRAD	John Young
JOHN BARRON MARK	Ray Colcord	ROBERT WILDE	Paul Gregory
DAVID LANDOR	Edwin Ross	ANNE ST. JOHN	Ann Linsley
FATHER BENEDICT	Joseph Boley		

*The action, in four scenes, is laid during the present historical era, some years ahead of the current moment.*

Director: Dennis Gurney.

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ANOTHER SO-CALLED experimental strut which does not in any way alter the opinion previously expressed on most such efforts. It may be dismissed with brief comment. Concerned with a future crisis in the United Nations body and with the hero's determination to see to it that right and justice prevail, the play, couched in some of the worst blank verse on record, so mixes up its idealism with Nancy Bruff sex that only the author apparently can make head or tail of it, and some doubt may be expressed on even that point. In the script there is not the vaguest trace of any kind of competence, and in its performance scarcely more. In two words, a mess.

## SWEETHEARTS. JANUARY 21, 1947

*A revival of the 1915 musical comedy with book by Harry B. Smith and Fred de Gresac, revised by John Cecil Holm, lyrics by Robert B. Smith, and music by Victor Herbert. Produced by Paula Stone and Michael Sloane for beyond the season performances in the Shubert Theatre.*

## PROGRAM

DOREEN	Marcia James	SYLVIA	Gloria Story
CORINNE	Nony Franklin	PRINCE FRANZ	Mark Dawson
EILEEN	Janet Medlin	PETER	Richard Benson
PAULINE	Betty Ann Busch	HANS	Ken Arnold
KATHLEEN	Martha Emma Watson	BARON PETRUS VON TROMP	
NADINE	Gloria Lind		Paul Best
GRETCHEN	Eva Soltesz	HON. BUTTERFIELD A. SLINGSBY	
HILDA	Muriel Bruenig		Anthony Kemble-Cooper
DAME LUCY	Marjorie Gateson	PRIMA BALLERINA	Janice Cioffi
LT. KARL	Robert Shackleton	ADOLPHUS	John Anania
PEASANTS	{ Robert Reeves	HOMBERG	Cornell MacNeil
	{ Raynor Howell	AMBASSADORS	{ Robert Feyti
LIANE	June Knight		{ Louis De Mangus
MIKEL MIKELOVIZ	Bobby Clark	CAPTAIN LAURENT	Tom Perkins

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Village square in Zilania. Act II. The palace.  
Director: John Kennedy.

HAVING ENJOYED a holiday in the case of the books of *Street Scene* and *Finian's Rainbow*, the one on this occasion again afforded the reviewers, including the apple of your eye, the opportunity to dispense words on the dreariness of most musical comedy books and to profit from the paradox of being paid for boring their readers to death. It also provided one or two of them with the favorite chance to condemn the books of the musical shows of yesterday *in toto*, which of course makes no sense but which they always can get away with because perhaps not more than one out of every hundred of their readers ever saw the old shows and because the hundredth does not feel



like wasting his time writing contradictory letters to block-heads. But if the *Sweethearts* book is not what it should be, there are always Victor Herbert's songs to make you overlook the fact and, in the event that they do not happen to be to your tweedy taste, always Bobby Clark to make you overlook them in turn.

I take it that you have been following me long enough now to know how I stand on Bobby. There have been some comedians in the long period of my aisle service who seemed pretty funny fellows at first sight and sometimes at even second and third sight, but who thereafter didn't seem so hilarious to me and who gradually departed my enthusiasm. Yet here I am after thirty years still laughing my sides sore at him. His routine may be much what it always was, but no matter so far as I am concerned. What is more, I hope that he never changes it. It is plenty good enough for me, and probably will be for the next thirty years, if we both live that long.

The present show gives Bobby — or at least he has cagily seen to it that it gives him — a field-day, and when Bobby has a field-day you may be sure that there is no grass left when he gets through. He may work for laughs like a coal-heaver, but it is his great difference and distinction that he never makes you feel he is working that hard. Where certain other comedians lose you the moment a bead of perspiration rolls down their noses, Bobby holds you and doesn't let go. I realize that there are some so backward or so tony that our man does not exercise his effect upon them, and they are likely to put me down for a pitiable lowbrow when I write such stuff. It's all right with me. I'd rather be such a lowbrow than the kind of highbrow who permits himself a chuckle only when its merchant is some more elevated comedian who would swoon if anyone ever suggested that he paint his nose red and die if a director asked him to fall on the floor in pursuit of a cigar butt. If you are as low in this respect as I am, *Sweethearts*, at least when Bobby is on the stage, should pleasure you. If you aren't, go, to something like *Present Laughter*, and to blazes with you.

Returning to the question of the show's book, which a measure of revision has not helped but rather damaged, if such a thing is possible, it is not that it is nonsensical so much as that it is not nonsensical enough. As was argued in an earlier chapter, a nonsensical book with no intrusion of realistic sense is something to be desired under such musical circumstances. The fault of this one is that every now and then a fairly intelligent observation has been allowed to creep in and ruins what should be an over-all illogic and imbecility. If we are going to have mythical kingdom plots, as in this case, let us have them as they used to be, in all the glory of their uncontaminated absurdity.

The production is a painfully economical one; the leading male performers, aside from Clark, evidently learned stage comportment from a sedulous study of broomsticks; the leading ladies, the Misses Story and Knight, are decorative in all departments but voice; and the chorus girls do not wear, as might be suspected, fright masks, though the effect is the same.

## ALL MY SONS. JANUARY 29, 1947

*A play by Arthur Miller. Produced by Harold Clurman, Elia Kazan and Walter Fried with Herbert H. Harris for beyond the season performances in the Coronet Theatre.*

## PROGRAM

JOE KELLER	Ed Begley	CHRIS KELLER	Arthur Kennedy
DR. JIM BAYLISS	John McGovern	BERT	Eugene Steiner
FRANK LUBEY	Dudley Sadler	KATE KELLER	Beth Merrill
SUE BAYLISS	Peggy Meredith	ANN DEEVER	Lois Wheeler
LYDIA LUBEY	Hope Cameron	GEORGE DEEVER	Karl Malden

SYNOPSIS: Act I. *The backyard of the Keller home on the outskirts of an American town. Ten o'clock Sunday morning.* Act II. *Twilight that evening.* Act III. *Two o'clock the following morning.*

Director: Elia Kazan.

THE PLAY is the kind which the reviewers, however skeptical they may be about some of its other points, always particularly endorse for its sincerity. The business has ever fascinated me. Nine out of ten plays, whatever their nature, are perfectly sincere. The notion that sincerity is confined largely to topical, serious plays, of which this one is a sample, is like the notion that farces and comedies are always the product of light-minded and frivolous men. It is a notion that would reserve truth, honesty and personal integrity to such playwrights as Elmer Rice and Edward Chodorov and dismiss as butterflies, dissemblers and frauds such as Aristophanes and Molière. There was and is every bit as much mental, emotional and professional sincerity in a farce like Hoyt's *A Texas Steer* as in some such passionate document as Brieux's *The Red Robe*. And there is as much in a comedy like George Kelly's *The Fatal Weakness* as in a drama like this of Miller's. But such is the peculiarity of many critics that the relative gravity of a theme seems to them indicative of its dramatizer's probity and that, as a consequence, the playwright who treats of

some subject of immediate import, however fumblingly, is blessed with the attribute, while one who treats however scrupulously of some such enduring but theoretically minor subject as the love of man for woman is either on the trivial and disingenuous side or a Frenchman.

Mr. Miller's umbrage is directed against profiteers and crooks in the late war. That his feeling in the matter is perfectly earnest is clear. But that does not necessarily make him any more worthy as a playwright than the same feeling, which I share with him, makes me any more worthy as a critic. There is, for example, small doubt that in the case of *Mrs. Warren's Profession* Shaw was something less than fully sincere and in the case of *Too True To Be Good* as sincere as the most sincerity-loving critic might wish, yet for all that the former remains much the better play. And if you want a lot more examples, come around some day with a lunch basket and a bottle of Scotch and I'll be glad to bore the ear off you for a couple of hours.

Another point that the confrères always gratifiedly make in connection with plays like this *All My Sons* is that, in their phrase, it is "about something," a conception which fascinates me almost as much as the sincerity business. Certainly it is about something, but so, unless I am mistaken, is every play ever written. Yet it is the predisposition of the brothers to reserve the commendation, as with sincerity, mainly for plays which deal either journalistically, editorially or even literarily with topics more or less of the current moment. Accordingly, since Mr. Miller's play deals with a man who by devious means has got rich from war profits, it is about something, whereas some play like *Cyrano de Bergerac*, which deals merely with man's tragic quest of and sacrifice for the unattainable, is presumably about nothing.

It seems to me, moreover, that most of these timely plays that are praised as being about something are about much the same something with which plays have been dealing for many years. There is not, for example, any great essential difference between the something said by this *All My Sons* and the something said many times more effectively

all of seventy years ago by Ibsen in *Pillars Of Society*. Miller's crooked Keller operates through defective airplane cylinders to selfish ends and personal gain and to throw off suspicion of wrongdoing shifts the blame to another, but in the end is punished for his guilt. Ibsen's crooked Consul Bernick operates through ships to selfish ends and personal gain and to throw off suspicion of wrongdoing shifts the blame to another, but in the end is punished for his guilt. In the former case, the punishment is external; in the latter, it is internal. But otherwise the theme is at bottom the same. Miller develops it largely through one of the guilty man's sons; Ibsen develops it largely through the man himself. Yet in both instances the idea is identical: a man who sacrifices the weal of others to his own advantage is a scoundrel, and retribution in one form or another is his due.

If you want a lot more play examples in this case as well, come around some day with a dinner hamper and a case of Scotch and I'll bore the other ear off you.

At this point, someone will give vent to the usual protest that, after all, there are not any really new ideas in the world, which is nonsense, and that, even if the present theme is an old one, it is the treatment of it that counts, which is sense. But Mr. Miller's treatment, it so happens, is nothing to get excited about all over again. The elements which he employs to advance the theme are as familiar as the theme itself, and the manner in which he handles them is generally not less familiar. We thus are again presented with the idealistic son in opposition to his practical father, the son silently in love with the fiancée of his brother believed to have been killed and hesitant in the declaration of his feelings, the mother's puzzling conviction that her missing son is not dead, the next-door couple who serve the purpose of interrupting the action that might otherwise tend toward monotony, the customary neighborhood youngster who is relied upon to liven up the proceedings and who, as usual, doesn't, etc. Snatches of the dramaturgy are good enough in a way, and the play's advocacy of the platitude that a return to the prin-

ciples of decency and honor is desirable, even imperative, naturally finds no objection, if not much palpitating interest, on the part of the audience. But, though the play is honest, sincere and, as the colleagues would have it, about something, it seems to me to be just another in the line of exhibits which misses out because it says what we already all too well know in a manner we already know as well, and in terms and language that are undistinguished.

A final observation. Most often, it would appear, it is the critically poorer plays that are About Something. So far this season they have been such as *On Whitman Avenue*, *A Flag Is Born*, *Temper The Wind*, *The Big Two*, and this *All My Sons*. Last season, out of a grand total of fourteen, only three were critically even relatively fair: *The Assassin*, *State Of The Union*, and *Jeb*; and that is being pretty liberal about even the three. The rest, *Fox-hole In The Parlor*, *The Private Life Of The Master Race*, *Skydrift*, *The Rugged Path*, *Strange Fruit*, *Dunnigan's Daughter*, *Home Is The Hero*, *A Young American*, *Deep Are The Roots*, *Truckline Café*, and *This, Too, Shall Pass*, along with the three, were not within a hundred miles of some such alleged about-nothing play as *Harvey*.

The acting, except for Ed Begley as the nefarious father and Beth Merrill as the mother, was mostly orthodox. The direction by Elia Kazan resorted to the old trick of melodramatizing the action whenever it threatened to become a bit flat. And the back-yard setting by Mordecai Gorelik was so drenched with the usual obvious artificial foliage that when the ingénue wistfully sighed, "How beautiful this all is!" a loud laugh issued from at least one spectator.

The exhibit, in short, was another in which author and director conspire to keep the characters nervously on their feet and so prolong for two and a quarter hours a discussion which might satisfactorily be resolved and settled in half that time if they were permitted quietly to sit down and talk things over.

## IT TAKES TWO. FEBRUARY 3, 1947

*A comedy by Virginia Faulkner and Dana Suesse. Produced by George Abbott and Richard Aldrich for 8 performances in the Biltmore Theatre.*

## PROGRAM

CONNIE FRAZIER	Martha Scott	TODD FRAZIER	Hugh Marlowe
MR. FINE	Julius Bing	MONK RATHBURN	Anthony Ross
MRS. LOOSBROCK	Reta Shaw	COMFORT GIBSON	Temple Texas
BEE CLARK	Vivian Vance	BILL RENAULT	John Forsythe
ELEVATOR BOY	Robert Edwin		

*SYNOPSIS: The entire action takes place in the living-room of the Fraziers' apartment, in the Murray Hill section of New York. Time. Late fall, 1946. Act I. Scene 1. Late afternoon. Scene 2. One o'clock the next morning. Act II. Scene 1. Saturday afternoon, two weeks later. Scene 2. Five-thirty the same afternoon. Act III. Noon, the next day.*

Director: George Abbott.

IT IS SUCH OCCASIONS that persuade me confidentially to address myself as follows: "Now see here, George, me lad, why do you persist in wasting your time in this way? Dramatic criticism as a profession is quite all right, but what, I ask you, has such stuff got to do with it? You're not as young any more as you used to be, and you brag that money doesn't any longer interest you, and it's time you got some sense, of which you could stand a little. So why don't you either hire some not especially bright boy of fifteen to cover such shows for you — he'd have to be not so bright or he wouldn't take the job — or else retire to your pond and spend the rest of your days, like a Thoreau or Alf Landon, in peace?"

The trouble with me, however, is that I don't listen to myself. Maybe it's the fault of my diction and I should take lessons. Maybe it's because I don't trust myself since the time I talked myself into buying dress shirts that fastened at the back and those real estate mortgages guaranteed to be as sound as the Rock of Gibraltar. I don't know.

But whatever it is, let the curtain go up on almost anything at all and there you will find El Dopo duly quartered in his old seat.

It was in his old seat, accordingly, that you found him at this number. The program intimated that it was a comedy. But, like some other things the programs tell us — such, for example, as that the well-dressed young blood reflects *le douceur de vivre* by being *épouvante* at the thought of inflicting his epidermis with anything but marquisette underdrawers — the intimation was a slight exaggeration. That is, it was a slight exaggeration if comedy means something that amuses one to the point of laughter. All that the pair of authors negotiated was the old marital misunderstanding and bedroom transaction given what they erroneously imagined was striking novelty by garnishing it with the current shortage of apartment facilities. We were asked to believe that a husband and wife who have seriously quarreled and separated will inevitably be reunited because other living quarters are not immediately available. Since this took a deal of believing and since the argument was not materially assisted by night club gags, the evening may be argued to have been something less than satisfactory. That I remained in my seat for two of the three acts is still another indication that I am probably losing my mind, or at least what after so many such experiences is left of it.

Itemized account of what went on in those two acts:

1. Wife: "I want to be near my husband so I can get some good out of him." Other Woman (*with leer*): "It depends just what you mean by 'good.'"
2. Three allusions to the "john," or toilet.
3. "To be really distinguished, I suppose I'd have to pose for a Calvert whiskey ad."
4. The wife entered suddenly, found her husband with a girl who had removed her shoes, and as usual suspected that he was guilty of having had an affair with her.
5. The joke about wanting a Martini without any vermouth in it.



6. The spraying of a small plant with a seltzer siphon.
7. A woman appeared in a dress with a large cluster of silk on the posterior. "Are they putting the motor in the rear this season?" asked another character.
8. The business of not knowing which side of a modernistic painting was the top or bottom.
9. A man remarked to the apartment-hunting wife that he wanted to show her his bed, which was the kind that comes out of the wall when you press a button. Her husband, who was eavesdropping, heard her remark, "That would be fun," and promptly became hysterical because he thought she meant that she was going to occupy the bed with him.
10. The husband opened a closet door and everything in it tumbled out onto his head.
11. The dumb blonde character with the Dixie drawl who called everybody "honey."
12. The indignation of the wife when the husband told her that she snored.
13. Her indignation when he didn't notice that she had on a new dress.
14. Constant ringing of telephone bells and door bells.
15. "So this room is the living-room; pretty big for just living!"
16. "Why do they want to drain swamps for housing projects; why don't they just build the houses on dry land?"
17. The fat female comic named Mrs. Loosbrock.
18. The snooping, suspicious sister-in-law.
19. The comedy business of trying to put long-stemmed flowers into a small vase.
20. The comic-strip quarreling between husband and wife.

Plus thirty or forty more items of a kind.

The acting, except for an amusing performance of the Dixie nitwit by a voluptuous specimen of Hollywood bait named, *Deus avertat!*, Temple Texas, was of the assembly-line order; and the direction by George Abbott followed his usual principle of making the actors appear to be running madly away from the script.

## JOHN LOVES MARY. FEBRUARY 4, 1947

*A comedy by Norman Krasna. Produced by Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein 2nd in association with Joshua Logan for beyond the season performances in, initially, the Booth Theatre.*

### PROGRAM

MARY MCKINLEY	Nina Foch	LIEUT. VICTOR O'LEARY	
OSCAR DUGAN	Ralph Chambers		Lyle Bettger
FRED TAYLOR	Tom Ewell	GEORGE BEECHWOOD	
JOHN LAWRENCE	William Prince		Max Showalter
SENATOR JAMES MCKINLEY	Loring Smith	LILY HERBISH	Pamela Gordon
MRS. PHYLLIS MCKINLEY	Ann Mason	HARWOOD BIDDLE	Harry Bannister

**SYNOPSIS:** *The action takes place in the living-room of the apartment of Senator James McKinley in the St. Regis Hotel, New York. Act I. Monday afternoon, 3 p.m. Act II. Tuesday morning, 11 a.m. Act III. Scene 1. Immediately afterwards. Scene 2. Three hours later.*

Director: Joshua Logan.

IT WAS ALSO, on the very night following, that you duly discovered Sir Noodletop in his accustomed seat at this second comedy number. This one apparently contained some so-called laughs, judging from the strange noises in my vicinity. But just what induced them I wouldn't know, unless it is that some people, appreciating that they are not expected to talk in the theatre, can't resist opening their mouths and emitting sounds anyway. As for me, the show was so profuse in corn that it seemed to be laid not in a New York hotel room, as the program insisted, but in a Carolina mountain still.

Having hit it rich with *Dear Ruth*, the author doubtless said to himself once a sucker twice a sucker so let's give the come-ons another dose of much the same whambo. And, having said it, he went and did it. And very possibly his con game will work again and he will haul in some

more money, which is unquestionably all that he was thinking about in the first place, being from that area where money is accepted as a token of genius and where a writer who gets five thousand a week is esteemed as fifty times better than any crumb like Poe, who was lucky if he got enough for a square meal every other Tuesday. It certainly isn't that I have any objection to playwrights or anybody else making money. But, when they write such stuff as this, I deplore their manners in inviting me to come around and watch them make it.

The usual apology of the producers of such parcels is that it may be all right for the critics to larrup them but that they nevertheless serve the purpose of providing escape to the public. Just where the escape is, I can't gather. Far from providing escape, the shows provide rather only a re-immersion in the same old familiar hokums, and it is hard to understand how anyone can escape from himself by being hit over the head for two and a half hours with all the stale things he remembers from years past. This whole business of escape, at least in a theatrical sense, is fraught with dubiety. The idea that it is to be achieved solely in humor, or what more often merely passes for humor, is responsible not only for a lot of bad failures but for a lot of selfish disregard for a swindled public. Such of this season's pseudo-comedies as *It Takes Two*, *The Bees And The Flowers*, *Loco*, *A Family Affair*, *Wonderful Journey*, *Lovely Me*, *Love Goes To Press*, and the sort have been ample evidence of their producers' error. The sound humor of a *Born Yesterday* may provide escape. The counterfeit humor of a *John Loves Mary* provides only a renewed and uncomfortable imprisonment of the spirit. It is quite possible, as I have noted, that the public may paradoxically find a desired escape in even this bivouac of Krasna's. That is for the public to decide. But when it comes to me, the escape lies rather in the direction of the auditorium's red lights.

The plot of the comedy has to do with a returned GI who, on behalf of another who has saved his life on the battlefield, marries the latter's English fiancée for the sole

purpose of being able to bring her to America for him. When he arrives back home, he discovers that his friend in the meantime has married elsewhere and that he accordingly is burdened with a wife whom he has difficulty in explaining to his own fiancée. The dialogue humor consists in such flavors as "You've got to have a bag when you go to a hotel — I mean a handbag" and "It would take awfully bad food to disagree with *him*." The character humor involves a former lieutenant who is now a major of ushers in a movie palace. The plot complications are arbitrarily denied solution in the first act by explaining in the last that the hero could do nothing about it because no one would listen to him, which, since everyone had indicated a perfect willingness to hear him out, is scarcely acceptable. The acting is fair enough — Loring Smith and Tom Ewell being considerably better than that — and the direction is expert. But in general the evening is only stagnant water trying again to flow under the old bridge.

# THE STORY OF MARY SURRETT

FEBRUARY 8, 1947

*A play by John Patrick. Produced by Russell Lewis and Howard Young for 8 performances in the Henry Miller Theatre.*

## PROGRAM

ANNA SURRETT	Elizabeth Ross	MAJ. GEN. KAUTZ	Thomas Glynn
MARY SURRETT	Dorothy Gish	BRIG. GEN. HOWE	Robert Morgan
LOUIS WEICHMAN		BRIG. GEN. FOSTER	Dallas Boyd
	Bernard Thomas	COL. TOMPKINS	Lee Malbourne
LOUIS PAYNE	Don Shelton	COL. CLENDENIN	Arthur Stenning
GEORGE ATZERODT	Zachary Berger	SPECIAL PROVOST MARSHAL	
DAVID HEROLD	Michael Fox		Tom Daly
JOHN SURRETT	John Conway	MAJ. HENRY RATHBONE	
JOHN WILKES BOOTH	James Monks		Gordon Barnes
CAPT. WILLIAM SMITH		LT. HENRY VON STEINACKER	
	Graham Denton		Bill Hitch
SGT. DAY	Larry Johns	GEN. JUBAL BENTLEY	John Pimley
COL. BURNETT	Douglas McEachin	FATHER WIGET	Harlan Briggs
GEN. JOSHUA HOLDEN		W. E. DOSTER	Hugh Mosher
	Richard Sanders	DR. SAMUEL MUDD	
BRIG. GEN. EGIN	Wallis Roberts		Tom J. McGivern
REVERDY JOHNSON	Kent Smith	EDWARD SPANGLER	
MAJ. GEN. HUNTER			Lytton Robinson
	Edward Harvey	MICHAEL O'LAUGHLIN	
BRIG. GEN. HARRIS			Bill Reynolds
	Frank McFarland	SAMUEL ARNOLD	Larry Johns
MAJ. GEN. WALLACE	Robert Neff		

**SYNOPSIS:** Act I. Scene 1. *The living-room of Mary Surratt's boarding house. Washington, D. C., 1865.* Scene 2. *The same, three hours later.* Scene 3. *The same, one week later.* Act II. *An improvised courtroom in the old penitentiary building, a few days later.* Act III. Scene 1. *The same. Midnight, several weeks later.* Scene 2. *A cell in the old penitentiary building on the U. S. Arsenal grounds at Washington, D. C., a few minutes before noon on the following day.*

Director: John Patrick.

THE ATTEMPT to percolate into drama the record of the woman who went to the gallows for her charged complicity in the assassination of Abraham Lincoln does not come off. Unlike the English and French, our playwrights have never been critically successful in treating of American women either famous or infamous, and it is thus that Mary Surratt now takes her place with all her dramatic sisters like Barbara Frietchie, Dolly Madison, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Carry Nation, Emily Dickinson, Lizzie Borden, *et al.*

My friend, John Mason Brown, writing of the musicalized *Street Scene*, observes: "When Maurrant is arrested after the murder of his wife it becomes impossible not to smile as he turns to his daughter to intone, 'What did I do it for?' and a great many words of the same kind. In short, though the evening has its distinguished features, it is bound to seem at war with itself. It labors brilliantly to produce the realism of Mr. Rice's text, and then huffs and puffs no less industriously to shatter it. In spite of its obvious merits, what this new *Street Scene* suffers from is not the heat of Mr. Rice's story but the frequent humidity of Mr. Weill's attempt to turn a realistic drama into an opera."

While I do not share my good colleague's critical opinion, I can at least well understand any such personal reaction, though it seems to me that Maurrant's "What did I do it for?" upon the murder of his wife is not so very different from Verdi's Othello's, or that other such allegedly jarring words are much more operatically incompatible than, for example, such as Mozart's Don Giovanni's "Tell the old buffoon that I expect him to dinner tomorrow evening"; and though I further suspect that were *Street Scene* laid in Milan and sung in Italian what is objected to would waywardly be found sufficiently plausible. Criticism otherwise proceeds, I think, simply from the surprise and shock of seeing and hearing for the first time a realistic American theme treated in an operatic manner, and

the surprise and even shock are not materially different from those experienced by criticism upon its first contemplation of, say, Picasso's modernism or the first audition of Richard Strauss' so-termed tonal anarchy. Nor, I venture, is *Street Scene* quite wholly the realistic thing it is argued to be. While it surely may not be described on the whole as romantic, its love story, which is its operatic treatment's chief theme, fully subscribes to Denis de Rougemont's acute definition, in *L'Amour et l'Occident*, of the essential element of romance as unhappy mutual love.

The point in relation to *The Story Of Mary Surratt* is that any such historical-biographical play, like any such operatic *Street Scene*, plainly calls in many cases not merely for a Coleridge suspension of judgment but for a double-Coleridge dose of it. In the instance of the usual play, one is asked simply to remit judgment that what one is engaging is plainly fiction and to imagine that it is rather actuality transferred to the stage. In the instance of a play like this, however, it is demanded that one not only suspend judgment that what one is engaging is not fiction, but, in addition, that the actors are not recognizable actor personalities playing the characters but are factually the historical personages. It is the consequent difficulty that causes most of these modern biographical-historical characters to impress one as characters on a motion picture screen: two-dimensional ghosts remote from life and actuality, and the documentary plays in which they figure as bogus. It is therefore mainly when the plays are comedies and make some concession to disbelief that they are relatively acceptable. A Napoleon in a *St. Helena* taxes the credulity. A Napoleon in a *Madame Sans-Gêne* or *The Man Of Destiny* seems much the more real and reasonable. And will no one kindly seek to controvert any such opinion by naming the various Lincoln plays which appear exceptionally to have been swallowable by local audiences. Lincoln, it would seem, would be swallowable to American audiences even were he played by Bobby Clark. The author of *The Story Of Mary Surratt*, it seems, made a big practical mistake in keeping him off-stage.

It is a perversity of audiences and many critics, of whom often I am one, that they are able much more readily to accept dramatic fiction for the time being as fact than fact as fact. Fact frequently has a way of seeming spurious when placed upon a stage, perhaps because it does not really after all belong there in the first place. It gives the imagination no free pasture; it too frequently has the air of having been transcribed by a studious book-keeper; it seems as misplaced as fiction would be in a court circular. Poetry may palliate it, but prose, save it be satirical or humorous, only paradoxically emphasizes its artificiality. It is, in brief, theatrically unbelievable, a bastard born of truth and greasepaint.

Mr. Patrick's play is further unsatisfactory on other counts. Since, first, an audience is antecedently aware of the historical record, it lacks all suspense and, after its first act, must rely for interest on the ingenuity of its dramaturgy, which here is missing. Secondly, since the four hundred or so witnesses who testified at the Surratt trial necessarily have to be drastically curtailed for stage purposes — they are here reduced to a mere half dozen — and since the trial thus lasts little more than half an hour, the ultimate condemnation of the protagonist seems to be absurdly abrupt and is dramatically unconvincing. Thirdly, since Mary Surratt was a negligible person and since the play can not honestly present her otherwise, her fate lacks weight and size, as the fall of insignificance is scarcely fraught with the elements of profound tragedy. Fourthly, the play, for all its historical verity, unavoidably edges into the pattern of the endless mimeographed melodramas of the yesterdays with their innocent heroines persecuted by the law, brought into cruel courtrooms, and defended by their upstanding and loyal lovers. Fifthly, the final scene in the prison cell adheres to an even more familiar pattern in the doomed woman about to meet her death and visited successively by her tearful young daughter, her heartbroken lover given to consoling oratory, and the usual benign priest. Since the actor playing the latter in this case bears an alarming resemblance to the late Irvin



Cobb, the pathos of the scene suffers an added blow. And, sixthly, the spectacle of a heroine confronted and battered throughout the evening by enough villains to have stocked the complete series of Sullivan, Considine and Woods melodramas tends to be inconveniently humorous.

The acting company, notably Miss Gish in the role of Mary Surratt, is generally competent; the direction by the author is for the greater part able; the settings by Samuel Leve serve the play nicely; and the lighting by a newcomer, Girvan Higginson, is first-rate.

## THE WANHOPE BUILDING. FEBRUARY 9, 1947

*A fantasy by John Finch. Produced by the Experimental Theatre under the auspices of the American National Theatre and Academy and under the direct supervision of Theatre Incorporated for 5 performances in the Princess Theatre.*

### PROGRAM

4-F	Haskell Coffin	MR. 10	Walter Craig
FLASHY PAGE	John Jordan	MR. 11	Anthony Grey
MAGGIE	Dorothy Patterson	MR. 12	Courtney Burr, Jr.
GEORGE	Walter Craig	1ST CUSTOMER	Ford Rainey
EDDIE	Martin Balsam	2ND CUSTOMER	Frederic Cornell
MRS. MEAD	Octavia Kenmore	ATTENDANT	Frank Richards
MICHAEL	Edmond Le Comte	FELINA	Beatrice Straight
SLEEPING DRUNK		ARNOLD	Lex Richards
	Courtney Burr, Jr.	YOUNG LOVERS	{ Penelope Sack
HOUSEWIFE	Winifred Cushing		Robert Wark
GUARD	Frank Richards	MISS QUEEN	Margaret Barker
PROFESSOR THORSTEIN		POMEROY	Anthony Grey
	Frederic Cornell	MADAM ENDOR	Freda Altman
INTERVIEWER	Clark Howat	JO LIGHT	Don Peterr
MEDICAL EXAMINER	Don Peters	MAX	Robert Wark
SECRETARY	Penelope Sack	JOHN B. SHEERMAN	Ford Rainey
BROWN HAT	Will Kuluwa	POLICY	Blair Cutting
ANNOUNCER	Robert Wark	COMMITTEE	{ Frank Richards
QUIZ MASTER	Blair Cutting	PILOT	Clark Howat
BARYTONE	Billy Rollo		

**SYNOPSIS:** *The play begins and ends in Michael's bar; the rest takes place in the Wanhope building.*

Director: Brett Warren.

THE REVIVAL of this particular experimental enterprise, which was allowed to lapse during the war years, is a matter for critical good-will, since the various parties thereto are more or less theatrically experienced and not merely the usual hopeful amateurs or semi-amateurs. That the good-will can not extend to its initial offering is unfortunate. While the play definitely is not "commercial" and is hence

within the scope and purpose of the venture, it lacks the quality which too often only theoretically goes hand in hand with the non-commercial, and, for all its author's elevated intentions, falls between the two non-existent stools, which would be something of a trick were it not in similar cases such a common occurrence.

Mr. Finch's design is to command in terms of allegory a greater sense of responsibility in the modern social body and a renunciation of its current tendency toward *laissez-faire*. The injunction is delivered through an inordinately complicated plot about a potential dictator quartered on the top floor of a building five hundred stories high who, it has been given out, has invented a bomb capable of numbing the will power of the people. Of the latter, all but one are cynical that anything can be done about it. The exception, a sailor, takes steps to find out what can be done and to that end climbs to the would-be dictator's lair, encountering, like Bunyan's Christian, innumerable obstacles on the way. He discovers that the bomb is a fraud, but when he returns to apprise his fellows of the fact, learns that they are still indifferent and scornful of the collateral philosophy that the way to safety, security and freedom lies within themselves.

The dramaturgy through which the allegory is filtered is generally so ill-contrived that confusion piles on confusion to the frequent point of absurdity. And the writing, while at very widely scattered moments pithy enough, is in the aggregate so didactic and so given to undramatic phraseology that what might be theatrically valid in the theme becomes moribund.

Since the central purpose of the experimental group is to give a hearing to playwrights whom the commercial theatre disdains and since the play is thus the thing, there is no point in discussing the performance. If there were, it is to be feared that the opinion in that direction would be no different from that on the play itself.

## CRAIG'S WIFE. FEBRUARY 12, 1947

*A revival of the play by George Kelly. Produced by Gant Gaither for 69 performances in the Playhouse.*

## PROGRAM

MISS AUSTIN	<i>Kathleen Comegys</i>	MRS. FRAZIER	<i>Virginia Hammond</i>
MRS. HAROLD	<i>Viola Roache</i>	BILLY BIRKMIER	<i>Herschel Beniley</i>
MAZIE	<i>Dortha Duckworth</i>	JOSEPH CATELLE	<i>Hugh Rennie</i>
MRS. CRAIG	<i>Judith Evelyn</i>	HARRY	<i>Allan Nourse</i>
ETHEL LANDRETH	<i>Virginia Dwyer</i>	EUGENE FREDERICKS	<i>John Hudson</i>
WALTER CRAIG	<i>Philip Ober</i>		

SYNOPSIS: *The entire action of the play takes place in the reception room at the home of the Walter Craigs. Act I. 5:30 in the evening. Act II. Ten minutes later. Act III. The following morning at 8:30.*

Director: *George Kelly.*

THE REVIVAL brings one amusedly to reflect on some of the reactions to the play when it was first produced back in the October of 1925. Unless I am much mistaken, one of them, and the chief one, was admiration of the author's daring in performing any such cynical operation on his leading woman character and for once viewing the female of the species without the usual rose-colored glasses. That Strindberg, Wedekind and Co. — to drag them in again for the good Lord knows how many times — had long before made Kelly's surgery look in comparison like the removal of a small splinter from the finger, is not to the immediate point, since it is American playwrights we have in mind. But the notion held at the time that Kelly was the first of these to throw overboard the old sentimental approach and to present a woman character for what she factually was, which is to say something that rhymes with the main attribute of a mosquito bite, is what induces the smile.

This is not to say that Kelly did not do a good job. His analysis of a wife unscrupulously intent upon preserving

at any cost her material security was and remains another testimonial to his uncommon sagacity in the delineation of his women. It is even to grant that he did such a delineating job better than any other native playwright before him. But to believe, as many seemed to believe when his play was initially shown, that he had no predecessors in the treatment of female artifice, intrigue and unscrupulousness is hardly close to the fact.

The idea that American playwrights before 1925 had uniformly regarded women as something approximating innocent little dewdrops — an idea that oddly persists in some quarters even today — needs only a casual investigation to prove its emptiness. It would, of course, be stretching the point to absurdity to mention the villainous adventuresses in the early gallery melodramas, almost all of whom made Harriet Craig look like an angel from heaven. Such characters were simply cardboard figures painted black, superficial creatures motivated not from within but arbitrarily prodded into their deviltries for the convenience of the plots, mostly as ridiculous as themselves. It is, however, the appreciable point that our stage on its higher level had surely not been without more authentic female characters quite as honestly and fearlessly probed as Kelly's choice baggage.

The quality of the exhibits embracing them a thing wholly apart, the girls in some of the plays were far removed, indeed, from any identity with vestal peaches. As far back as 1908, David Graham Phillips, though still romantic, treated one of the sex with a fair degree of realism in *The Worth Of A Woman*. A year or two later George Bronson Howard and Wilson Mizner wrote and produced *The Only Law* to show up the sentimental nonsense in the character of Laura Murdock in Eugene Walter's *The Easiest Way*, which had been esteemed by many as sensationally on the beam. Paul Armstrong then went in for an Ibsenish appraisal of his heroine in *The Escape*. And somewhere around that time Edward Knoblock tossed out an item called *Tiger! Tiger!* which startled many theatre-goers with the picture of its particular hussy. The wench

of Louis K. Anspacher's *The Unchastened Woman*, produced in 1915, was even more unscrupulous than Mrs. Craig, and the harridan of Martin Brown's *Cobra* more unscrupulous than both of them rolled together. One or two of the females in the plays of William Hurlbut, to say nothing of the heroine of Alan Dale's *The Madonna Of The Future*, were anything but lace valentines. And, in the year before Kelly's play appeared, a playwright named O'Neill put on *Welded* and *Desire Under The Elms*, neither of whose women were precisely to be described as honeysuckles.

And these were not all.

Kelly's progress as a dramatist since *Craig's Wife*, commendable as it was, is impressed upon anyone who has followed his later work. Not only does his treatment of his various Eves indicate an increased fertility; his writing no less indicates the same. In the latter regard, there is no longer recourse to such ingustable humors of this *Craig's Wife* as "He's a professor of the Romance Languages" — "Naturally. And I suppose he's told you he loves you in all of them," or "Well now, does everybody have to be killed in automobile accidents?" — "No, there's always the Galveston Flood, for husbands." Nor is there any more leaning on such clichés as "You're blinded by a pretty face, son, as many another man has been blinded," "Can you remember when anyone has darkened that door?," "No house is big enough for two women who are interested in the same man," and "What is there to consider, darling, except that we love each other?"

The improvement in dramaturgy is quite as noticeable. No longer are his plays so full of such stereotyped stage directions as "She turns and glances up the stairs to assure herself that no one is listening," "She strikes the table with her knuckles," and "Craig comes quietly down the stairs and stands on the landing, looking inquiringly from one to the other." To say nothing of such as "She stands looking eagerly through the window," "She steps back from him suddenly and touches her hair in an effort to appear casual," and "He looks at her under his brows." Or such

as "She buries her face in his shoulder and cries hard," and "Entering wearing his hat and carrying the newspaper he brought home."

The fact that Kelly's play holds one in spite of all such platitudes of speech and action demonstrates that even in that earlier stage of his career there was an underlying serious talent in him that made itself felt. It is accordingly gratifying that, unlike so many of our American playwrights who originally suggested healthy potentialities and thereafter failed to realize them, he not only has kept to his beginning promise but has developed it into actual performance. *Craig's Wife* may now seem a bit spotted with the years; the treatment of its Harriet, once looked on as something quite out of the ordinary, may now have become theatrically familiar; but it still remains a play worth another view. We may have been getting altogether too many revivals of old plays in this season and some may have considered them to be a reflection on the vitality of the contemporary theatre. But, even so, it seems better to have revived a twenty-two-year-old play like this one than further to have diminished that vitality by putting on such fresh, new lobster-pots as *Lovely Me*, *Love Goes To Press*, *Little A*, and *It Takes Two*, among many others.

Generally one of the best of our directors, the author in this instance has so accelerated the dialogue in the earlier portions of the play that much of it sounds like pig-Latin and is unintelligible. This not only afflicts Miss Evelyn's performance of the Harriet role, which is additionally handicapped by a couturière's creation more suited to musical comedy, but lends to the other characters the impression of so many mimickers of Walter Winchell's radio delivery. When things are allowed eventually to quiet down, the company finds itself and proceeds with credit, particularly in the cases of Philip Ober, Kathleen Comegys, Viola Roche, Dortha Duckworth, and Virginia Dwyer.

## DONALD WOLFIT REPERTORY

FEBRUARY 18, 1947

*A program of Shakespearean plays, together with Ben Jonson's Volpone. Produced by Hall Shelton, by arrangement with Advance Players Association, Ltd., for 3 weeks' performances in the Century Theatre.*

## THE COMPANY

Donald Wolfit, Rosalind Iden, Violet Farebrother, Kempster Barnes, Ann Chalkley, Frederick Horrey, Eric Maxon, Josef Shear, Alexander Gauge, Geoffrey Wilkinson, Robert Algar, Eric Adeney, Malcolm Watson, John Wynyard, Marion Marshall, Penelope Chandler, David Dodimead, George Bradford, Richard Blythe, Charles Ollington, and Margaret Stallard.

Director: *Donald Wolfit.*

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**I**N MY CHILDHOOD DAYS, one of the chief exports of what was then Bohemia seemed to be servant girls, a specimen whereof was found in due course to be functioning in the family domicile. For some weeks, the belle was observed preparing her wardrobe for attendance upon a wedding. My mother one day ventured to inquire of her who the bride and groom were to be, and was apprised that they were another Bohemian servant girl who was a friend of our heroine's and a plumber's helper from the neighboring countryside. Upon the girl's return from the event, my mother asked her what the wedding was like. "Oh," she replied, "it was all right, but I wouldn't exactly say it was brilliant."

In my later years, one of the chief exports of what is still England has continued to be — along with women's club lecturers, Major Grey's chutney, and woolen socks with a contumelious disregard for the big toe — Shakespearean actors. The latest specimen to come into port is Mr. Donald Wolfit, and his introductory performance is as Lear. Like the servant girl, my report is that he is all right



still persist in my mind and feeling as something more than flickering tapers. And, finally, while Mr. Wolfit's performance may have impressed my venerated friend as the greatest piece of Shakespearean acting he had seen in the long and valuable years he had served his journal and considerably beyond, I regret that it scarcely impresses me as have such of a variety of actors, quite aside from Novelli and von Sonnenenthal, as Forbes-Robertson's Hamlet, Werner Krauss' Shylock, Paul Wegener's Henry IV, Alexander Moissi's Hamlet, Basil Sydney's Hamlet, and Gemier's Shylock, to nominate only a few that come quickly to mind.

The supporting company is of a distinctly provincial flavor and in the main grossly incompetent. And the scenic investiture, if it may be called by so elegant a term, looks as if it had been fished out of a Blackburn warehouse. (The program credits it to one Ernest Stern, but if the intention is to mislead one into believing that the Stern in question is the Ernst Stern celebrated for his scenic contributions to the Reinhardt German stage, the intention takes on the proportions of heroic impertinence. A trace of Stern's designs is manifest, but what has been done with and to them practically obliterates any likeness.) The evening's sole attraction is the star but, since he bears no high-sounding Old Vic label and since no air of London theatrical fashionableness attaches to him, it was correctly anticipated that he would fail to enjoy the devoted patronage of our otherwise American Anglophiles.

With an irrepressible zeal matched only by the squirrel, the beaver, the laguardia and other such mammalian phenomena, Wolfit quickly followed *Lear* with *As You Like It*, *The Merchant Of Venice*, *Volpone*, and *Hamlet*. In view of his wholesale energy, the circumstance that he has not seen fit to export himself also in other of his numberless roles like Richard III, Macbeth, Othello, Falstaff, Bottom, Ford's Giovanni, Ibsen's Solness, etc., etc., comes as something of a surprise. It is however, probably just as well that he refrained. Talent, of which he has a plenty, nevertheless has its limitations, and ambition often its

penalties. With all the highest intentions and resolve in the world, he has overextended himself in even the limited repertory which he has ventured here. His *Lear*, as has been pointed out, has various commendable qualities along with some not quite so commendable, and the same may be said of his *Shylock* and *Volpone*, if in much lesser degree of his *Hamlet* and *Touchstone*.

As with *Lear*, our visitor reads two of the four latter roles with a smart understanding. That he knows much of his Shakespeare is perfectly evident. That he also has the right idea of the Jonson spirit is equally so. To his further credit are an order and directness in performance, a voice which if nothing remarkable is yet most often competent in projecting his interpretations of the roles, and the frequent gift of suggesting that there is a mind working behind all the greasepaint. In *Shylock* and *Volpone*, as in *Lear*, are these qualities most noticeable. What is uniformly lacking is that extra quality which distinguishes the exceptional actor from the merely able, that inner something which warms talent into genius and which, like the moon, singularly directs the tides of an audience's reactions. What is also apparently absent in a more realistic direction is physical style, or that grace and ease of body which must necessarily complement the other attributes of the really superior actor. It is because of this latter deficiency that Wolfit, like any other actor in the same position, is destined to find himself at his most comfortable in roles like *Lear* and *Shylock*, which with their voluminous, flowing robes and elaborate general makeups afford welcome concealment to figures insufficiently fluid and void of authority. But if he lacks this attribute and so now and again misses one of the facets from which such of his fellow English Shakespearean actors as Olivier and Gielgud — along with, I am told, even in a measure Robert Helpmann and Alec Clunes — have profited, he makes up for it in some other ways, chiefly in a clarity of approach to most of his parts that is not always visible in Olivier and that assuredly was not visible in the single Shakespearean presentation which Gielgud showed us here some ten

years ago. It is this infrequently wanting security of address, indeed, that stands him best in critical favor, even though his resources sporadically may not be strong enough to fulfill it. Slip though he may, the design usually remains clear.

Our visitor is further to be congratulated on reducing to a minimum those vocal tricks so often indulged in by Shakespearean actors. The average Lear in his thunderous rumbling of some of the passages gives one the impression that he has swallowed a bowling alley going at full blast. The Shylocks one encounters sometimes alternate between the bowling alley and the suggestion that they have swallowed a purring kitten. The Touchstones frequently sound as if they had just dined off an omelet of five-cent candy and ping-pong balls. Little of all that for Wolfst. Though now and again, notably in *Hamlet*, given to this general kind of Shakespearean Tauberism, he for the greater part abstains from any such chromatic whimsies and handles his voice without the more obvious monkey-shines.

It is, in fact, not always a matter of what he does with a role so much as what he refrains from doing. Though, for example, his Volpone offers moments when it seems physically at variance with its well thought out plan, it nevertheless gratifyingly at no point imparts the feeling, which we have gained from certain other Volpones, that the actor is a stock company Richelieu who has confused the Jonson character with the late Abe Hummel at a fancy dress party. In the same way, though his Shylock at one or two moments threatens imminently to go Episcopalian, it remains in hand and does not, as we sometimes have viewed the acted role, toady to itself and seek craftily to give it Anne Nichols popular, sympathetic box-office overtones. (Nor does it, praise be, give its exit from the courtroom scene the usual picture of a character suffering from a broken leg and a bad case of dysentery.) And though his Touchstone's design is faulty and its corpus at odds with its vocal projection, it in turn at least does not descend to the more familiar kind of vaudeville characteriza-

tion which in former days paved the way for a trained dog act.

It is our visitor's misfortune that his company in these other plays, as in *Lear*, offers him no, or at most very meagre, support. The resulting impression is of a star player constantly and optimistically shouting Allez-ooop and being vouchsafed nothing in the way of the anticipated jumps. Among the bleak troupe an actor or actress here and there in one or another of the plays emerges for a spell with a passable performance. But even at their relative best none is more than what a colored jazz band leader of my acquaintance, who has displayed his art in Paris, is fond of describing as come-see come-saw.

Mr. Wolfit will not consider such derogation a mark of undue critical severity or American inhospitality. Similar strictures were the company's portion at the hands of the English critics, who took him to task for dumping so measly a troupe on his audiences. It may be, and doubtless is, that he has not been able to gather enough from the box-offices to improve the aggregation. It may even be that, like the late Richard Mansfield and some other actors, he is unwilling to have any competition on a stage and desires selfishly to be the whole show. But whatever it is, it is no way to bid for favor in a land one of whose states is still Missouri. A single good performance in a play, particularly a classic, is far from being enough. It is too easy for even a little candle to shine in the darkness. Wolfit is a bigger candle, but whether big or little a candle can not light itself. And even if it can, as he miraculously at times seems to indicate, its flame needs guarding from the chill draughts.

Of the star's performances, in summary, the best are *Lear*, *Shylock*, and *Volpone*, the poorest *Hamlet* and *Touchstone*, the latter of which becomes in the actor's hands a clown who is merely clown, who fails to suggest the likelihood that the play in which he figures was designed as a whimsical mockery of itself, and who seems at times to be slightly skeptical of his own humor and to disbelieve, as E. K. Chambers has significantly put it, that

the character embodies Shakespeare's comment on romance rather by what he is than by anything he consciously says. "For how," Chambers continues, "can romance more readily be made ridiculous than by the disconcerting contact of the natural gross man who blurts out in every crisis precisely those undesirable facts which it is the whole object of romance to refine away?" The Jacques of Wynyard commits no such error and, with its sly, sardonic cast, makes up for Wolfit's critical lapse.

Though, as recorded, the star's pronunciations throughout the repertory are for the greater share agreeably accurate, his company with minor exception enunciates the English parts of speech as if they had been invented by the late Lawrance D'Orsay for Cockney music hall purposes.

## O'DANIEL. FEBRUARY 23, 1947

*A play by John Savacool and Glendon Swarthout. Produced by the Experimental Theatre, Inc., under the supervision of the Theatre Guild for 5 performances in the Princess Theatre.*

## PROGRAM

DAN	Walter Coy	COLONEL BASIL	Robert P. Lieb
ALEX	Anne Burr	TECHNICIAN 4TH GRADE	
LEE	Jack Manning		Norman Budd
REPORTER	William Munroe	CORPORAL	James Holden
BELLHOP	James Holden	ITALIAN GIRL	Isabel Bishop
PRIVATE SUMIAN	James Holden	WORKMAN	Billy M. Greene
COMPANY CLERK	William Munroe	CLEANING WOMAN	
BARTENDER	Rudy Bond		Georgia Simmons
ETHEL	Isabel Bishop	VIGNATI	Royal Raymond
POTTY	Billy M. Greene	J. P. COLLINS	Keene Crockett

SYNOPSIS: Prologue. A *Chicago hotel room*, 1952. Act I. Scene 1. *Barracks*, 1943. Scene 2. *A bar*, 1943. Scene 3. *A dugout*, 1944. Scene 4. *Apartment living-room*, 1945. Act II. Scene 1. *Lee's office*, 1947. Scene 2. *Dan's office*, 1947. Scene 3. *A telephone booth*, 1948. Scene 4. *Dan's office*, 1950. Scene 5. *Philadelphia*, 1951. Act III. Scene 1. *Campaign headquarters*, 1951. Scene 2. *An airport*, 1952. Epilogue. A *Chicago hotel room*, 1952.

Director: *Paul Crabtree.*

THERE IS A DRAMATIC, if rather familiar, idea here but one which again inexperienced playwriting has botched. What the authors have in mind is the kind of forces which, under certain circumstances, might conceivably contribute to governmental tyranny. Their protagonist is an ambitious former GI of problematical probity yet with a talent for convincing oratory. Employing both the lacking and the existing attributes simultaneously, he prevails upon a copious body of his quondam comrades in arms, who have been disillusioned by post-war conditions to the point of not caring what happens, to follow him in rectifying matters. That ignorance combined with indifference

may thus operate to dangerous ends is the point upon which the final curtain portentously falls.

Employing the Living Newspaper technique in combination with snapshot writing, the collaborators have simply thrown their theme in pieces at an audience instead of dramatizing it as a whole. Not only that, but they have so overtalked it and so repetitiously hit the nub of their argument that any punch that might be inherent in it is drained out of it. In only one or two short scenes is there any dramatic effect, and the effect in those cases lies in the automatic impulse of their subject matter rather than in anything they have contributed to it. What might have been a play of some impact thus has been hamstrung by experimental writers whose acquaintance with the elements of dramaturgy is nil, and about whom in general you will find discourse in a subsequent chapter. There is more real drama in a single line of an authentic experimental dramatist like O'Casey than in all those of these others assembled. When, for example, in his as yet unproduced *Red Roses For Me* a character deplores the death of a young man who sacrificed himself to a mere shilling's betterment 'of his oppressed fellow laborers' wage and another quietly answers, "Maybe he saw it in the shape of a new world," you get something worth any hundred long speeches in the combined plays of these amateur aspirants to dramatic estate. And in such a single line you get as well a hundred times more eloquence than in all the windy harangues of an effort like this *O'Daniel*, which, if mere length and number counted for anything, would be sufficiently operative not only to nominate its protagonist for President of the United States, as its authors themselves peculiarly seem to believe, but even to elect Ben Hur over him.

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## YELLOW JACK. FEBRUARY 27, 1947

*A revival of the play by Sidney Howard and Paul de Kruif.  
Produced by the American Repertory Company for 21  
performances in the International Theatre.*

### PROGRAM

O'HARA	Arthur Keegan	JESSE W. LAZEAR	Alfred Ryder
McCLELLAND	William Windom	ROGER P. AMES	Emery Battis
BUSCH	Eli Wallach	MAJOR CARTWRIGHT	Angus Cairns
BRINKERHOF	John Becher	DR. CARLOS FINLAY	Philip Bourneuf
MISS BLAKE	Anne Jackson	WILLIAM H. DEAN	Robert Rawlings
WALTER REED	Raymond Greenleaf	AN ARMY CHAPLAIN	Donald Keyes
ARISTIDES AGRAMONTE	Efrem Zimbalist, Jr.	A COMMISSARY SERGEANT	Ed Woodhead
JAMES CARROLL	Victor Jory		
COLONEL TORY	John Straub		
WM. CRAWFORD GORGAS	Eugene Stuckmann		

Scene. *Cuba*. Time. 1900.

Director: *Martin Ritt*.

**H**AVING WITHERED as a repertory enterprise, the American Repertory Company here obdurately sought to preserve what little life it might possibly have left through the revival for what was prayed to be a month's run of the thirteen-year-old laboratory play about Walter Reed and Co.'s heroic battle against yellow fever in the period directly after the Spanish-American war. The choice of the hoped-for pulmotor, like that of all the company's previous exhibits save *Androcles And The Lion*, could not have been other than controvertible. Though very much better presented when it was originally shown under the guidance of Guthrie McClintic and though it received much favorable critical notice, the play fell far short of popularity, appealed only to limited audiences, and expired to a financial loss after seventy-nine performances.



How it could be expected to put any money in the bank after a mere thirty-two, even were the presumption that it would run that long correct and even under its present more economical production circumstances, my private accountant, though an expert in headscratching, found himself unable to figure out.

It thus became clearly evident that what the Repertory Company badly needed from the very beginning was, among half a dozen other things, just such a student of figures. He might have told it what it apparently did not know: that you always have to allow for poor road tryout business. (the company dropped a sizeable amount of its capital) ; that you have to arrange for a safe, workable average between bad New York weeks and good, if any; that you can not reasonably expect with any such venture to play to a consistent, sustaining eighteen thousand dollars a week over a long period; that such a stop-gap figure is much too high for a repertory company without box-office names; and that plays like *Henry VIII* and *John Gabriel Borkman*, which seldom if ever have made money, could not be anticipated suddenly to turn out to be bullion. Without the benefit of such a statistician's counsel, the company naturally went bankrupt and now had to pass around the hat again in order to keep going in any form whatever.

There has been, I observe, a great deal of sympathy for the organization's plight. With the best of personal, if not critical, will, I am afraid that I am unable to share in it. As much as anyone else, I feel that a really able repertory company might be a valuable thing for our theatre. But this one was very far from being that. It was, to be entirely frank about it, for the most part slipshod in its acting, often insufficient in its direction, stupid in the choice of most of its plays, ill-advised in much of its casting, downright absurd in the selection of at least one member of its leading acting personnel, and wholly devoid of that sense of showmanship — I use the word in its better sense — without which the fates are certain to wag their fingers at any such undertaking. That its purpose was high and its

resolve applaudable no one, and certainly not I, will gainsay. But purpose and resolve are vain unless real talent is behind them, and there was little of any such talent in evidence. There was also, it is to be feared, the suggestion that the enterprise was a walking ghost of the old Le Gallienne Civic Repertory company, which itself turned out to be simply a walking ghost and which also met with financial disaster. And, above all, there was about the company an atmosphere of mothballs and staleness, of leading players worn out, personally uninteresting, and minus that aura which generally influences the attitude of our paying audiences.

There was, in short, an augury of failure about the aggregation from the start. I appreciate that it is neither polite nor generous for a critic to say such a thing, but it is the truth, as four out of every five of my colleagues will, if they are honest with themselves, not hesitate to admit. But whether they see fit to admit it or not, I think I violate no confidence when I report that that is exactly the way they personally felt in the matter.

I am not — I am not by any means — kicking an enterprise when it is down. It was down in the first place. And I am just as sorry as anyone else that things were not more astutely planned at the outset and that what conceivably with less self-seeking and with greater modesty, greater skill and greater wisdom might have proved an added asset to our theatre has from all indications gone down the slide. I come not to bury Caesar, but to deplore the circumstances which inevitably portended his death.

The *soi-disant* American National Theatre and Academy has sentimentally passed around a cup and raised twenty thousand dollars from itself, the Actors Equity Association, the American Theatre Wing War Service, the United Scenic Artists, and various individual actors and citizens to see the organization through what is euphemistically described as its crisis. And several other parties — sound recording companies, theatrical photographers, scene builders, and advertising agencies — have charitably contributed their mite to the patient. All of which is un-

deniably fine and noble. But if the money raised were a hundred times twenty thousand dollars it would not help to do other than to perpetuate a venture that might profit infinitely more from ten cents' worth of inner ability and theatrical intelligence.

Sentiment is one thing; fact, alas, another; and the sentiment of the company's well-wishers and benefactors seems to be peculiarly ill-founded. Even if *Yellow Jack* were surprisingly to have made money, it could at best have made very little, and that would only prolong the agony. The Repertory Company, even with that little in its pocket, would still be short its three hundred thousand dollars of originally contributed capital, and the twenty thousand dollars which was now doled out to it could be of small assistance. According to published reports, the company dropped from five to six thousand dollars weekly since it opened shop in the previous November. It further required part of the present twenty thousand to meet its expenses in its last repertory weeks. Let us very liberally say that five thousand was left. Still allowing that *Yellow Jack* might not lose but make a little money and that the planned subsequent and only mildly shared in *Alice In Wonderland* might break even or much better, it was hard to see how five thousand or, with good luck, even ten or twenty more could possibly guarantee much future life to an enterprise whose past record indicated that that sum would sustain it for only five or six weeks at the most. As it turned out, *Yellow Jack* closed after only twenty-one performances to a loss of fourteen thousand dollars.

If the American Repertory Company were conceivably to continue as such, it became clear that it would need not only a much better repertory but a much better company — and a first-rate advisory bookkeeper. To say nothing, of course, of some very angelic angels.

The production of *Yellow Jack* was wretchedly directed by Martin Ritt, who not only violated its authors' idea that its heroic adventurers in science should be played with no slightest emphasis on their heroism, but who caused the characters to strike such poses in spotlight baths

that they frequently assumed the appearance of the holy figures in the religious dramas of the last century. Because of the misguided direction, it was impossible to tell whether the helpless actors were bad or were just made to seem so.

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**TIN TOP VALLEY. FEBRUARY 27, 1947**

*A play by Walter Carroll. Produced by the American Negro Theatre for 43 performances in the A.N.T. Theatre.*

**PROGRAM**

RUTH TALBOT	<i>Lillian Adams</i>	FIRST NEIGHBOR	<i>Vivian Dogan</i>
MILDRED PRICE	<i>Betty Haynes</i>	SECOND NEIGHBOR	<i>Lulu Hairston</i>
GREG TALBOT	<i>Charles Nolte</i>	A PHOTOGRAPHER	<i>William Malkin</i>
BUCK PRICE	<i>Frederick O'Neal</i>	PREACHER WILSON	-
SOLDIER	<i>Michael Lloyd</i>		<i>Frederick Carter</i>
WILLIE TURNER	<i>James Jackson</i>	A MOURNER	<i>Maggi Coates</i>
FIRST MAN	<i>Joe Nathan</i>	A CRIPPLED WOMAN	
SECOND MAN	<i>Kenneth Porter</i>		<i>Sadie Stockton</i>
THIRD MAN	<i>Michael Lloyd</i>	ORGANIST	<i>Bessie Powers</i>
WILKS	<i>Walter Carroll</i>		

**SYNOPSIS:** Time. *The present.* Act I. Scene 1. *Exterior of the Price and Talbot shacks in Tin Top, a late afternoon in July.* Scene 2. *A clearing in the woods, later that evening.* Scene 3. *Same as Scene 1, a few minutes later.* Act II. Scene 1. *Same as Scene 1, Act I, late afternoon of the following day.* Scene 2. *The same, about two hours later.* Scene 3. *The same, about four hours later.* Act III. Scene 1. *The same, later afternoon of the following day.* Scene 2. *The same, morning of the following day.* Scene 3. *A church, afternoon of the following day.*

Director: *Abram Hill.*

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**I**T NEED HARDLY be said that it is the current predilection, indeed fashion, in white cultural circles to view with an alarming beneficence almost everything, however scanty, that the Negro attempts in the arts. But the present occasion once again unsocially provides his enterprising whoopers with no whoop material. The mixed-cast play with which our colored brethren have seen fit to pursue their experimental activities had better been left unplayed.

Mr. Carroll sets himself to a renewed attack on racial prejudice, this time laying the scene in a scurvy mill-town in the backwoods of the South. His protagonist is a white boy who becomes friends with a Negro boy and who declares his intention to go North with the latter and enroll

himself in the same college. His mother, still vain of the superiority of her race in the face of its cruelly imposed poverty and squalid living, finds her Caucasian pride so outraged at his decision that, unable to keep in hand her wrath over what she deems a signal affront to her family honor, she seizes a pistol, which has been planted for the preceding two hours with the assiduity of an amateur horticulturist, and shoots him to death. Though she subsequently confesses her guilt, the community holds the Negro boy the murderer, with the customary rope in the offing.

These riches are dramatized with no feeling for drama-turgy or for the critical acumen of an audience, with no sense of character, and with enough impassioned rhetoric to burst the actors' blood-vessels. Nor does the direction or the performance do other than to render gratuitously life-less what is already a dramatic corpse.

# THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST

MARCH 3, 1947

*A revival of the comedy by Oscar Wilde. Produced by the Theatre Guild and John C. Wilson in association with H. M. Tennant, Ltd., for 80 performances in the Royale Theatre.*

## PROGRAM

LANE	<i>Richard Wordsworth</i>	CECILY CARDEW	<i>Jane Baxter</i>
ALGERNON MONCRIEFF		MISS PRISM	<i>Jean Cadell</i>
	<i>Robert Flemyng</i>	REV. CANON CHASUBLE, D.D.	
JOHN WORTHING, J.P.			<i>John Kidd</i>
	<i>John Gielgud</i>	MERRIMAN	<i>Stringer Davis</i>
LADY BRACKNELL		FOOTMAN	<i>Donald Bain</i>
	<i>Margaret Rutherford</i>		
HON. GWENDOLEN FAIRFAX			
	<i>Pamela Brown</i>		

SYNOPSIS: Act I. *Algernon Moncrieff's rooms in Piccadilly.* Act II. *The garden at the Manor House, Woolton.* Act III. *Morning-room at the Manor House, Woolton.*

Director: *John Gielgud.*

WILDE's ingeniously sniffish comedy or, if you will, farce, since comedy after all is often simply literary farce with suaver manners, gets a superior acting deal from Gielgud and his London company. Though the play has been done by a variety of American actors, some of them able enough, it is English actors who alone best can serve it, and with reason. The American actor, however proficient, is at a loss in any such purely artificial and stylized dramatic circumstances and his efforts to adapt himself to them inevitably take on the aspect of a strainful imitation of the English actor who should be playing the role in his stead.

An actor like Gielgud on the other hand is perfectly suited by nature to such an exhibit. There is about him, as there is about various other such English actors, that

suggestion of shadow of a masculine being, that quality of biological superficiality, which certain Wilde roles call for to be in key. There is also that brittleness of person, voice, and manner which these roles, and surely this Worthing, demand for their acting plausibility. And there is above all that desired air of diffident physical remoteness, of divorcement from the realistic corpus. Your American actor, though he act himself blue in the face, cannot approximate the species and cannot achieve any such detached impression. And the consequence is that, when he ventures into the Wilde domain, he with scarce exception presents at best the picture of a Harvard outfielder in a tulle uniform.

I have been scratching my brains in vain to think of an American actor who ever played even an English butler convincingly. To expect one to be satisfactory in a Wilde role is accordingly expecting too much. In fact, there is something waywardly ludicrous in seeing an American actor in even any role, whatever it is and very much more so one in Wilde, called Algernon, let alone, God wot, Algy.

The play under discussion, as everyone probably knows, is a triumph in dramaturgy. No other comedy in its time has maneuvered a tricky task more expertly; and for wit one must look far in the modern drama to find its like. It is, in short, so extremely skilful in all directions that, see it as often as one may, it still exercises its fascination. And it remains, above every other play of its kind, the ideal vehicle for the polished comedian.

Gielgud reveals himself as one such. The very qualities which impeached his attempt at Hamlet, at any rate in the performance which he delivered here, and which, I am told, aborted his stern efforts in the recent London production of *Crime And Punishment*, and which further have enfeebled some of his other dramatic activities stand him on this occasion in valuable service. And his supporting company in the aggregate, though not the London original, is close to first-rate. The evening all in all is a happy synchronization of players and playwright, without that trace of jar which, even in the present for the larger



part satisfactory revival of *Lady Windermere*, intermittently offers the effect of a blue gingham finger stuck through the Wildean pink satin fabric.

We hear a great deal of talk these days about so-called experimental plays, and up and down the land various groups have set themselves into motion, here and there not without a self-conscious air of derring-do and, of course, the usual collateral sniffs at the commercial theatre, to give them a hearing. These experimental plays, with minor exception, are experimental chiefly in the sense that their authors, mainly novices, have experimented with a form about which they know little or nothing, and with the duly doomed results. As Eugene O'Neill has observed, worthwhile experimental drama, save in the instance of rare and isolated genius, has never come from men who had not first mastered the conventional form. Nine-tenths of the present experimental drama is consequently nothing more than its authors' impertinent evasion of a sound dramaturgy of which they are wholly ignorant, or, in other words, a pretentious attempted concealment, under the guise of pioneering, of the fact that their dramatic covered wagons are without horses, much less wheels.

This *The Importance Of Being Earnest* is, contrarily, experimental drama at its best from a writer who, if antecedently he did not exactly master the conventional dramatic form as, say, his contemporary, Pinero, did, was nevertheless possessed of the intuition so well to comprehend it that he could audaciously toss it aside and improve upon it. Setting himself deliberately to write a play of almost anarchistic inconsequence — an inconsequence that magnificently defies while still it propels the play — he wrote to a friend in an unpublished letter, "There is no use adding place and time to the scenario, as the unities are not in the scheme. In art I am Platonic, not Aristotelian, though I wear my Plato with a difference."

One has only to study the immense dexterity with which in this play Wilde has maneuvered the trick of repetitions, which latterly in *The Iceman Cometh* has evaded even so generally expert a dramatist as O'Neill, to appreciate his

dramaturgical cunning, and, of course, the wit that cultivated it. No playwright before or since his day has demonstrated a similar artfulness in that specific direction. It was his curiously precise instinct for the basic principles of the conventional drama which permitted that wit not only saucily to take advantage of and play havoc with them, but which created out of the very violations of what had been venerated as immaculate dramaturgy a play that stands above and alone in its field.

Obviously, too, there is again that matter of style. Of style, the great bulk of present day dramatic experiment knows nothing, and, like an overdressed pusher, seeks to attract attention to itself with eccentric patterns and loud colorings. As Howe, who thirty-five years ago wrote one of the best critical essays on Wilde that I have read, observes, "His plays have the artist's fear of over-emphasis, in a theatre where over-emphasis is the journeyman's substitute for clearness of design and diction." One thus gets in Wilde's plays, and in this above all the others, that sense of perfect security of talent and purpose which always has about it the compelling charm of restraint and poise, and which never has need of pretending to dramatic vigor by metaphorically yelling over the footlights for Lefty, or howling marching songs through loud speakers, or, in comedy, crying awake and sing in terms more properly suitable to melodrama written by the late Samuel Shipman in collaboration with John Philip Sousa's most voluptuous trumpet player.

## PARLOR STORY. MARCH 4, 1947

*A comedy by William McCleery. Produced by Paul Stenger for 23 performances in the Biltmore Theatre.*

### PROGRAM

MARIAN BURNETT	<i>Edith Atwater</i>	LAINSON	<i>Dennis King, Jr.</i>
KATY	<i>Joan Vohs</i>	MRS. BRIGHT	<i>Dorothy Eaton</i>
CHARLES BURNETT	<i>Walter Abel</i>	GOVERNOR SAM BRIGHT	
CHRISTINE	<i>Carol Wheeler</i>		<i>Paul Huber</i>
EDDIE WEST	<i>Richard Noyes</i>	MEL GRANITE	<i>Royal Beal</i>
MIKE	<i>Frank Wilcox</i>		

*SYNOPSIS: The setting is the living-room of a professor's house in a university town somewhere west of the Missouri River. Act I. Friday evening in October. Act II. The same, immediately after. Act III. The same, immediately after.*

*Director: Bretagne Windust.*

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MUCH OF THE critical praise for the Wilde comedy on the preceding night was qualified with the time-honored deprecatory allusions to its "triviality" and "mechanically contrived plot and dialogue." Though this McCleery comedy did not, as may properly be suspected, enjoy a like measure of critical tribute, what share of endorsement it received was nevertheless modified by no such strictures and reservations. Yet while the Wilde play in spite of its alleged sins stubbornly remains a masterpiece of its genre and while this McCleery chop amounts to utterly nothing and for the major part is obvious peppercorn, any but the most hurried criticism should still be able to discern that not only is it the much more mechanically contrived in plot and dialogue but the much more trivial of the two. That its intent, particularly in the second direction, is greatly otherwise scarcely obscures the fact. Wilde, with the usual chuckle up his lace sleeve, disarmingly described his play as "a trivial comedy for serious people." Had Mr.

McCleery his wit, he might well and much more pointedly describe his as a serious comedy for trivial people.

The trivial people in question are those of such scant mentality that they arbitrarily regard as important any play like this which makes a show of treating of relatively important matters, however unimportant and even callow the treatment itself may be. Mr. McCleery's plot is of a former journalist who has aspirations toward the presidency of a Western college and whose ambitions are challenged by devious politicians and newspaper bosses. The story is made to serve as a funnel for the author's ideas on academic freedom, political charlatanry, freedom of the press, marriage, divorce, the sex problems of the young of the species, etc., etc. Though the subjects may be granted to be far from trivial, the playwright's aforesaid ideas on them are so routine and so unilluminated by anything remotely approaching vigorous thought, sharp understanding, or corrective wit that they achieve, despite themselves, an air of contrary triviality, much as does a child's pencil sketch of a mountain made from the mountain itself. The dramaturgy is in addition of so mechanical a nature that if the doors of the room in which the physical action occurs were bolted for so much as ten minutes the play would die on its feet. Not only is that action carpentered with such palpable tools that one can foretell in advance almost everything that is going to happen, but the dialogue supposed to assist it is so hammered together with the same manifest instruments that anyone in the audience, if one or another of the actors were suddenly to be seized ill, could handily jump onto the stage and take over from there on without a look at the script.

Any comparison of the Wilde comedy with the McCleery specimen would, of course, raise the ridiculous to new and hitherto unachieved heights. The comparison here is merely in the recorded eccentric critical attitude toward content and dramaturgy. That attitude, which has hardly been confined to the play under discussion, is what puzzles the judicious. There is more profundity in any sin-

gle such random allegedly trivial observation of Wilde's as "Intellectual generalities are always interesting, but generalities in morals mean absolutely nothing" than in the solemnities of all the McCleerys rolled into one. There is more humor in any single such allegedly mechanical line of Wilde dialogue as "When one is in town one amuses one's self; when one is in the country one amuses other people; it is excessively boring" than in all such of the McCleerys as, in reply to a woman in extreme décolletage who says she hardly had time to dress, "You hardly did." And there is a hundred times less mechanically contrived plot in the witty Gilbertianism of Wilde's than in the stereotyped clever-wife-supervising-unenterprising-husband and villain-brought-to-bay cogs of all the McCleerys from here to Columbus Circle.

Except for the two youngsters, Richard Noyes and the comely young Carol Wheeler, the acting was of low order; the direction by the ordinarily competent Bretaigne Windust helplessly commonplace; and the cheap interior setting by Raymond Sovey altogether too familiar from its use in several previous productions.

In conclusion, the technique of Wilde was to put profound remarks into the mouths of trivial people; the McCleerys' is unwittingly to put trivial remarks into the mouths of what they regard as profound people.

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## ON THE SEVENTH DAY. MARCH 6, 1947

*A fantasy by Urban Nagle. Produced by the Blackfriars' Guild for 21 performances in the Blackfriars' Guild Theatre.*

## CAST

Gordon Hunter, Doug Randall, Joseph Lane, Robert Hayward, Allen Stapleton, Robert Cordell, Paul Melville, Anne Vollmann, Mel York, Jo Delle Rondquist, Mike Garrett, Pauline O'Hare, and Jack Delmonte.

Director: *Urban Nagle.*

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THIS DISPATCH from the little theatre experimental front yet again brings dolesome tidings. In the interest of reader economy, we shall therefore be as brief as possible.

Father Nagle's fantasy consists in a garrulous and enervating expedition through Heaven, Hell, and America led by an archangel who has become bitterly cynical about mankind and who has been returned to earth to escort back to the celestial regions the archangelic creature who is to succeed him. The author employs Archangel I to dispense his views on what is wrong with the world. What is wrong, among eighty or ninety other things, seems to be the press, the radio, the moving pictures, the late war, the peace, the atomic bomb, the educational system, Communism, lack of faith, propaganda, military enlistment, present day society, alien school-teachers, the wartime blitzing of Rome, commercialism, and absence of spiritual values. About the only item Father Nagle forgot to include is bad plays like *On The Seventh Day*.

## AS WE FORGIVE OUR DEBTORS. MARCH 9, 1947

*A comedy by Tillman Breiseth. Produced by the Experimental Theatre, Inc., under the supervision of José Ferrer for 5 performances in the Princess Theatre.*

## PROGRAM

MRS. TORVIK	Mary Fletcher	AGNET BENSTAD FOSS	Sylvia Stone
MRS. NESS	Sara Floyd	CHRISTINA BENSTAD	Joyce Ross
GULLICK STURKELSON		ODIN STURKELSON	William Lee
	Somer Alberg	LARS FOSS	Joel Ashley
MOLLA STURKELSON		GONDA STURKELSON	
	Jennette Dowling		Dorothea MacFarland
MR. SVENSRUD	Cyrus Staehle	PASTOR FLATEN	Paul Ford
OSCAR SVENSRUD	Kenneth Tobey	MR. TORVIK	Graham Velsey

**SYNOPSIS:** *The action takes place on a Friday of early spring in the southern Minnesota farmhouse of the deceased Miss Etta Sturkelson. Act I. The kitchen, late morning. Act II. Scene 1. The parlor, early afternoon. Scene 2. The parlor, late afternoon. Act III. The large bedroom, early evening.*

Director: José Ferrer.

**B**ETTER NEWS. Of the season's experimental plays to date, this is by far the most interesting, in fact, the only one with any perceptible approach to merit. It is now twenty-odd years ago that the author, who was unknown to me, sent me the script and asked my opinion of it. I read it, found that it had a fresh sardonic humor and an intelligent dramatic audacity and commended it to various producers of the era, one and all of whom shook their heads as if suddenly afflicted with cerebraesthesia and promptly rejected it as a too dangerous commercial risk. That it was and remains such a risk is apparent, since it is doubtful whether a play with a coffin and corpse dominating its action would be likely to cause a frantic stampede at the box-office.

Around this coffin containing the mortal remains of a family aunt, greedy relatives and friends gather to learn

the nature of her last will and testament. Naturally expecting virtue to be rewarded and sin punished, they are grieved to discover that the deceased with a nice philosophical irony has left her worldly goods instead chiefly to the one amongst them, a young hussy bent on the pleasures of the flesh, who is genial and honest in what she does and not, like the rest of them, in any way hypocritical. Though the author has sweatfully extended his theme beyond its resources, though the dramaturgy, as usual, is not all it should be, and though his comedy wears thin in its later stretches, he indicates a good sense of character, an unorthodox dramatic mind, and a considerable gift for irreverent whimsicality. And, while there are times when his play dawdles (he has done some damaging rewriting of the original script), its main current has sufficient flowing power to make the aggregate not only ribaldly amusing but pleasing to anyone surfeited with the cautious timidities of much of the humor merchanted by our native playwrights.

There has been, I observe, some criticism of the authenticity of the experimental nature of the play. If a play which ventures courageously into a novel thematic treatment, which has no concern with the morality of the box-office, and which no practical producer would afford a stage chance is not experimental in every sense save alone dramaturgy, I do not know how the adjective is to be interpreted or what it stands for.

José Ferrer deserves chief credit for giving Breiseth, after these many years of vainly hawking his script, his little day in court.



# THE CHOCOLATE SOLDIER

MARCH 12, 1947

*A revival of the operetta by Oscar Straus, with a modernized version of the Stanislaus Stange version of the Rudolph Bernauer and Leopold Jacobson libretto, based on Shaw's Arms And The Man, by Guy Bolton and Bernard Hanighen. Produced by J. H. Del Bondio and Hans Bartsch for 69 performances in the Century Theatre.*

## PROGRAM

NADINA	Frances McCann	STEFAN	Michael Mann
MASCHA	Gloria Hamilton	KATRINA	Anna Wiman
AURELIA	Muriel O'Malley	PREMIERE DANSEUSE	
BUMERLI	Keith Andes		Mary Ellen Moylan
MASSAKROFF	Henry Calvin	PREMIER DANCER	
POPOFF	Billy Gilbert		Francisco Moncion
ALEXIUS	Ernest McChesney		

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Place. Nadina's bedroom in Popoff's house, situated in a small town in Bulgaria. Time. Autumn, last century. Act II. Place. The courtyard of the Popoff house. Time. An afternoon in spring. A year later. Act III. Place. The same. That evening.

Director: Felix Brentano.

NO SMALL MEASURE of the critical satisfaction that has reposed in the exhibit since first it was shown thirty-eight years ago lies in a contemplation of the craftiness with which Straus' music is made quickly and intelligently to interrupt the converted Shaw play whenever what little has been retained of its own intelligence threatens to depress the operetta medium. The idea, of course, seems still to obtain that it was originally nothing short of revolutionary to utilize any Shaw play, even such a farce-comedy as this *Arms And The Man*, for musical purposes. But *Arms And The Man* is after all essentially a libretto with dashes of malapropos satiric wit and, when these are

reduced to a minimum, it is as naturally suited to the operetta form as almost anything of Gilbert's. For it is generically Gilbert, though Walkley scoffed at the notion, camouflaged with a non-Gilbertian "theory of life and criticism of conduct," if I may borrow Walkley's phrase to support a disagreeing opinion. As maneuvered to operetta ends, the play, in brief, becomes the musical form as aptly as a farce by, say, Labiche, since the only point of stage difference is that of a contradictory ironic view of the romantic attitude and since the romantic music of Straus not only minimizes the contradiction but even renders it comically paradoxical. When, in a word, Shaw and a Viennese violin meet, as here, he emerges covered with lipstick.

The present revival, into which four other compositions by Straus have been incorporated in amplification of his already exceptionally melodious score, is far from brilliant in the selection of the majority of its cast and, in the case of the actor chosen for Bumerli, embarrassing to both song and story. And as in the five previous local presentations of the operetta, the vaudeville romps of the comedian in the Popoff role go a long way toward throwing a wrench into what should properly be a consistent operetta fabric. The idea, however, that Shaw, were he to view them, would be rightly upset is open to some question, since he himself on occasion has not been averse to similar stuff of his own, as anyone who has seen his *The Great Catherine*, for just one example, will appreciate. Nevertheless, when the Shavian plot is encumbered, as in this case, with a five-minute olio in which a corpulent funny-man endeavors to negotiate an arrested sneeze and in the process agitates his ample belly like an epileptic elephant, I complain even if Shaw would not.

The choreography by George Balanchine, except for the interpolation of a pair of the routine toe virtuosi, is moderately attractive; the lighting if not the settings by Jo Mielziner contribute to the stage atmosphere; and a newcomer named Gloria Hamilton in the role of Mascha supplies the personal ornamentation in which most of the other ladies in the cast are helplessly remiss.

## BRIGADOON. MARCH 13, 1947

*A musical fantasy with book and lyrics by Allan Jay Lerner, music by Frederick Loewe. Produced by Cheryl Crawford for a beyond the season run in the Ziegfeld Theatre.*

## PROGRAM

TOMMY ALBRIGHT	<i>David Brooks</i>	JEAN MACLAREN	<i>Virginia Bosler</i>
JEFF DOUGLAS	<i>George Keane</i>	MEG BROCKIE	<i>Pamela Britton</i>
ARCHIE BEATON	<i>Elliott Sullivan</i>	CHARLIE DALRYMPLE	
HARRY BEATON	<i>James Mitchell</i>		<i>Lee Sullivan</i>
KATE MACQUEEN		MAGGIE ANDERSON	
	<i>Margaret Hunter</i>		<i>Lidija Franklin</i>
FISHMONGER	<i>Bunty Kelley</i>	MR. LUNDIE	<i>William Hansen</i>
ANGUS MCGUFFIE	<i>Walter Scheff</i>	FRANK	<i>John Paul</i>
SANDY DEAN	<i>Jeff Warren</i>	JANE ASHTON	<i>Frances Charles</i>
ANDREW MACLAREN		STUART DALRYMPLE	
	<i>Edward Cullen</i>		<i>Paul Anderson</i>
FIONA MACLAREN	<i>Marion Bell</i>	MACGREGOR	<i>Earl Redding</i>

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Scene 1. A forest in the Scottish Highlands, about five on a May morning. Scene 2. A road in Brigadoon, then the village square — MacConnachy Square — later the same morning. Scene 3. An open shed, about noon. Scene 4. The MacLaren house, mid-afternoon. Scene 5. Outside the house of Mr. Lundie. Scene 6. The churchyard, dusk. Act II. Scene 1. A forest inside Brigadoon, later at night. Scene 2. A road in Brigadoon. Scene 3. The glen, immediately after. Scene 4. A bar in New York City, four months later. Scene 5. The forest — same as Scene 1 of Act I — three days later.

Director: Robert Lewis.

I CONFESS that the prospect of sitting through a show reported to be full of Scotch dialect, bagpipes, highland flings and forty or fifty pairs of kilt-bared knees, than which no item of the human corpus is more ocularly invidious, did not exactly engulf me in anticipatory raptures. I can ordinarily stand Scotch dialect for just about five minutes flat, and then not without firmly grasping the arm of my chair for support. The skirls emanating from a bagpipe uniformly impress my ear with all the dulcet love-

liness of a pig painfully afflicted with a strep throat and the colic. The highland fling I am able to endure for maybe three minutes, and only two if the participants see fit to emphasize their exuberance with joyous shouts and yells. And the human knee, Ann Pennington or no Ann Pennington, dimples or no dimples, has always looked to me like nothing so much as a misplaced crabapple with a case of mumps.

In other words, I am prejudiced. What is more, my prejudice has extended beyond musical shows to more than fifteen minutes of Harry Lauder, novels like Ian Maclaren's *Beside The Bonnie Briar Bush*, Barrie plays when the burr starts burring, and even Bobby Burns in large doses.

In another direction, I have also entertained an acute disrelish for some time now for Agnes de Mille ballets, and the report was that the show was chock-a-block with them. So on the whole I did not seem to be a particularly desirable critical customer for the exhibit and the management, had it been privy to my private thoughts, would have been more than justified in keeping its reviewing tickets and requesting me to stay at home.

Prejudice based on experience, of which I please myself to believe I have had an ample portion, is, however, nothing to sneer at. It is the distillation of acumen filtered through trial and error. The prejudice which I held against the various elements in the show was accordingly not at all arbitrary but the consequence of considerable constructive suffering. And did it once again prove well-founded? It certainly did not.

All of which goes to indicate that consistency may be a jewel, as people say, but that it is sometimes of the ten-cent-store variety. This *Brigadoon*, while it contains all the things noted that I have previously abhorred, is an excellent show. Worse, it is an excellent show not in spite of them but, blast me, largely because of them. What it proves, I suppose, is the genial correctness of Gilbert Murray's "Progress comes by contradiction; eddies and tossing spray add to the beauty of every stream and keep the water from stagnancy." And what it relevantly recalls, if I

may be so presumptuous as to join the company of the earlier remarked late Arthur Bingham Walkley, is that worthy's observation on critics. "The ideal critic," he said, "is pictured by the crowd, now as a milestone 'standing upon the antique ways,' now as a finger-post on the 'high priori' road. I have taken the less stately view of him as a vagabond, who accepts his impressions as they come and changes his moods with his horizons. Hence, like other vagrom men, I have had an instinctive repugnance for the methods of the Bench."

In other words, you can evidently no more always trust me than, it appears, I can trust myself. The old saying that the more things change, the more they remain the same doesn't seem to fit me. With me, it begins to look as if the more they remain the same, the more they change.

Lumping all the items of my long-standing dislikes together, the show, under the direction of Robert Lewis, treats them with so much taste, imagination, and humor that the result, with some other things of course added, is one of the most thoroughly engaging entertainments I have seen in a long time. In the first place, the story embracing the naked knees and other of my erstwhile aversions is a pleasant, if strangely unacknowledged, paraphrase of Friedrich Wilhelm Gerstäcker's little German classic, *Germelshausen*, dealing with a village which has been removed by a spell from the realistic concerns of the world and which comes to contented life again but once in every hundred years. In the second place, the music, while surely nothing to embarrass Carnegie Hall out of countenance, is similarly pleasant, and the lyrics agreeably simple and in key with the story. In the third place, the dances, instead of being stuck atop the whole like candy figurines, as is the more usual custom, are deftly integrated into the general texture. And, in the fourth place, the company is very nearly perfect.

Of the latter, the blue ribbon goes to Marion Bell, a newcomer who can not only sing but act and not only act but create a sense of beauty, but who all in all seems to me to be the most satisfactory addition to the musical comedy

stage since Jan Clayton showed up on it a couple of years ago. Other ribbons, if of a slightly paler blue, go to David Brooks, George Keane, Lee Sullivan, William Hansen, Pamela Britten, James Mitchell, Virginia Bosler, and Lidija Franklin. And, while we are at the ribbon counter, let us not overlook David Ffolkes, whose costumes, kilts and all, contribute handsomely to the general picture.

Thus it is that prejudice has turned out to be a boomerang and that knees are no longer crabapples but approach the peach; that the Scottish dropping of the "g," which once in my vocabulary was always followed by an appropriate loud damn, doesn't bother me whether in speech or in such songs as "Waitin' For My Dearie," "Jeannie's Packin' Up," and "My Mother's Weddin' Day"; that bagpipes, as sparingly used, don't sound too much like asthmatic Coney Island hoochie-coochies; and that the highland fling doesn't look so much like a lot of people with ants in their kilts. Thus it is, in short, that even a show containing all the things which in other days and other hands would have driven me back to rye and bourbon, and in spite of the fact that it allows itself a disturbing anti-climax involving the stale business of scrim visions, persuades your quondam mule that he formerly didn't know what he was talking about.

A note on the *Germelshausen* which the book of the evening so closely resembles. Written in 1862 and published in the two volumes called *Heimliche und Unheimliche Geschichte*, its story, like that of *Brigadoon*, is of a clerically proscribed and vanished village that comes to life for a single day but once in a century and of the love of a young man who has stumbled on it for a fair young girl he encounters there. The young man is a painter — in *Brigadoon* a tourist; the girl in both is the daughter of one of the village's eminent residents. In both cases the girl has a younger sister and is regarded by another young man. In the German tale the time element is conveyed to the stranger by the inscriptions on gravestones, in *Brigadoon* by the inscriptions in the girl's family Bible.

The story of the mysterious village is subsequently re-

lated to the stranger by an old forester in *Germelshausen*, by an old school-teacher in the Lerner show. There is music and dancing in the Gerstäcker story as in *Brigadoon*. The church, the pastor, the funeral with odd music, the fog, etc., appear in both. The German tale, which is laid in Thüringen, contains an allusion to the Celts in Wales; the musical show is laid in Scotland. In the Gerstäcker story the hero at the end loses the girl to the vanished village; in *Brigadoon* he similarly loses her but in a tacked-on happy ending goes back in the hope of finding her again.

The legend of vanishing towns and villages has been handled by a variety of German writers, among them Heine, Uhland and Müller, but the treatment described above is wholly different and entirely original with Gerstäcker.

*Germelshausen* was first published in America in 1898 by D. C. Heath and Co. in an edition edited by Professor Osthaus. It was reset in 1902 in an edition supervised by Orlando F. Lewis, former professor of modern languages at the University of Maine. It was later published, in 1906, by the Thomas Y. Crowell company of New York in an English translation by Clara Lathrop.

Mr. Lerner has blandly attributed the similarities to "unconscious coincidence." He has also brought himself to the comfortable conclusion that "Shakespeare borrowed plots indiscriminately and it didn't seem to disturb his reputation."

## THE EAGLE HAS TWO HEADS

MARCH 19, 1947

*A play by Jean Cocteau, adapted into English by Ronald Duncan. Produced by John C. Wilson for 29 performances in the Plymouth Theatre.*

## PROGRAM

COUNTESS EDITH DE BERG	THE QUEEN	Tallulah Bankhead
Eleanor Wilson	STANISLAS	Helmut Dantine
MAXIM, DUKE OF WILLENSTEIN	TONY	Cherokee Thornton
Kendall Clark	BARON FOEHN	Clarence Derwent

SYNOPSIS: Act I. *The Queen's bedroom, evening.* Act II. *The library, the next afternoon.* Act III. *The same, the following morning.*

Director: John C. Wilson.

THINKING to find in the play a vehicle to kindle the adoring zeal of her devotees, Tallulah Bankhead has found a vehicle right enough but has disappointedly also found that she has had to pull herself uptown in it. That her energy, notable as it is, hardly succeeds in dragging it more than a little part of the distance is not surprising, since it is so overloaded with rhetorical cargo and nineteenth century melodramatic luggage that the job would strain even the resources of all the horses that ever performed in *In Old Kentucky*.

On this occasion, the author has abandoned his experimental didoes and confected the kind of third-rate emotional drama from which Stravinsky might conceivably get the libretto to serve a second-rate opera. For the hand may be the hand of Cocteau, but the voice is the voice of Sardou. That the play may, indeed, well have been designed as a libretto in the first place is not improbable, since Cocteau has previously written in that form not only for the Stravinsky aforesaid but also for Honneger and Milhaud.



Hark, if you will, to the plot, which up to the last act lacks only the consistent, violent Sardou physical movement to pass for one of the later performances of that celebrated dramatic pasteboard riveter.

The queen of an European land in the last century, grieving for her husband who was assassinated on their nuptial night, returns after ten years from a self-imposed exile to get into spiritual communication with him ("*Sgombra è la sacra selva*"). In the midst of her mournful meditations ("*Pleurez, pleurez, mes yeux!*") a young revolutionary poet invades the palace bent on killing her. Wounded by the guards, he collapses, and the queen hides him from his pursuers. Symptoms of love presently betray themselves in her and it is not long before he is in her entourage. Duly a mutual amour envelops the twain ("*Ah non giunge uman pensiero*") and the poet, full of love ("*Ah, l'alto ardor*"), persuades his cherished one that it is her duty to abandon her exile and take up again the role of ruler over her domain, which in the interim has been evilly governed by her late husband's mother, the archduchess, and the Sardou prefect of police.

The latter, however, are loath to relinquish their power, which complicates matters. Since common sense obviously has no place in an opera libretto, even if played straight, the queen thereupon produces a vial of deadly poison which she has conveniently been carrying around to meet just such emergencies. The poet, who believes with small reason that she has betrayed him to the police, vituperates her ("*Ah, perchè non posso odiarti*") and she him, both fortissimo ("*Se tradirmi tu potrai*"). Whereupon the poet seizes and swallows the poison and simultaneously for good operative measure shoots her. In her death throes, which last for what seems an hour, she confesses that the insults she had heaped upon him were but to goad him into killing her, since love had conquered all and since she wished to die with him ("*O terra addio!*").

A few minor changes have been made in the script by the adapter, but they do not alter the general rouged complexion of the original.

In France, where the leading role has been played by Edwige Feuillere, this business of manufacturing vehicles for actress favorites has for a century or more assumed the proportions of a Willow Run, and with the expected consequences to dramatic art. But except for France and to some extent England the matter of mere vehicles in place of conscientious drama has long been in abeyance, and it is thus that the spectacle of an actress like Miss Bankhead resorting to and setting such purple claptrap to snare the public takes us back to the days when plays were not so much written as fashioned with tape-measures.

There is today something a little ridiculous in seeing an actress costumed to the ears, clinging to the center of the stage, and reciting enough lines to a helpless cast to suffice half a dozen actresses in any more reputable play. There is something waywardly comical in beholding her making the elaborate entrances and exits maneuvered by one of these vehicle manufacturers with the artful calculation of a football coach designing delayed forward passes and end runs. There is, in brief, the impression that the author of the occasion is not a writer of plays but of performers.

In this exhibit in particular, Cocteau has gone pretty much the whole hog. If there is anything that he has omitted from his vehicle job from the regal costumerie to the elegant palace folderol and from the long, uninterrupted star monologue to the tearful death scene, it escapes my nose. And does our Tallulah eat it up! I doubt if there has been such an appetite in these parts since the late Diamond Jim Brady did away with ten dozen oysters, six Porterhouse steaks and eight peach Melbas at one sitting, and touched them off with a savoury of three quarts of ice cream.

This Tallulah, let it not be mistaken, is an actress with a considerable natural ability. But, like some others, she seems to be under the delusion that if an actress doesn't act all over the stage for an unremitting two hours and a half she isn't an actress and may just as well go back to Connecticut and commune with the chickens. Her model appears to be not a Réjane or Duse, but Eva Tanguay. Vi-

talities, however and alas, is not always identical with histrionic art, and, if she will permit a mere critic to say so, a bit more modesty and restraint would no end help her. And, while the mere critic is about it, he might also suggest that it is never a bad idea to let someone other than herself pick an actress' plays for her. The list of these ladies who have insisted upon selecting their own plays, who have been loath to listen to impartial advice, and who have eventually found themselves out of reputation and favor is scarcely a meagre one. Miss Bankhead still has some personal drawing power, as her previous road tour attested. But the play after all, as Donald Wolfelt has lately been heard to remark, is the thing, and personal drawing power in time has a way of dwindling and expiring when that thing is not present.

Aside from Clarence Derwent, the star's supporting company appeared to have been recruited from a lumber yard. Such wooden performances have seldom been seen on the stage since the march of the soldiers in the old *Chauve-Souris* show. Among the chief sticks was Helmut Dantine, a Hollywood screen mime, whose idea of dramatic intensity was a fixed neuralgic wrinkling of the brow and whose carriage was akin to a hansom cab without a horse.

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## BATHSHEBA. MARCH 26, 1947

*A play by Jacques Deval. Produced by Maxmilian Becker and Lee K. Holland in association with Sylvia Friedlander for 45 performances in the Barrymore Theatre.*

## PROGRAM

GERSHOUM	Martin Ashe	OBRAM	Michael Stoy
HIRAM	Carleton Scott Young	NATHAN	Thomas Chalmers
JOAB	Rusty Lane	HANOUFATI	Maud Scheerer
MANASSEH	Paul Donah	AGREB	Joseph Tones
SHARI	Hildy Parks	BATHSHEBA	Pamela Kellino
URIAH	Phil Arthur	SOURAB	Patricia Robbins
NIZIAH	Leonore Rae	MICALE	Jane Middleton
AROUSSIA	Blanche Zohar	BAHILA	Barbara Brooks
DAVID	James Mason	ORPHIE	Lenka Peterson
GHAZIL	Horace Braham	LADY-IN-WAITING	Vega Keane

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Scene 1. *Joab's tent before Rabah.* Scene 2. *Top terrace of King David's palace in Jerusalem. Two days later.* Scene 3. *The same. One hour later.* Scene 4. *The same. Two months later.* Act II. Scene 1. *Uriah's tent before Rabah. Two days later.* Scene 2. *The King's terrace. The next day.* Scene 3. *The same. The next morning.* Act III. Scene 1. *The same. The next day.* Scene 2. *The same. A week later.*

Time. *During the summer of the year 1030 B.C.*

Director: *Coby Ruskin.*

LIKE SHYSTER LAWYERS defending their author clients against court charges of sexual smut, shyster playwrights and moving picture producers for years have fallen back on the Bible to gloss over and condone commercial excursions into sex which otherwise in all likelihood would be objectionable to the puritanically inclined. This is still another example of the subterfuge. The fornicatory romance, which might disturb the squeamish were its characters of contemporary vintage, becomes morally tolerable when they are safely David and Bathsheba. But David and Bathsheba or Mae West's Margie La Mont and Lieutenant Gregg the basic doings remain nevertheless much the same.

So poor, however, was Deval's dramatization, which according to Robert Gordon, the first and resigned stage director, was a Hollywood mixture of the moods of *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*, that audiences during the early road tryout period laughed when they were not expected to, quite as they did when the above-mentioned Miss West had at them several seasons before with her solemn account of the life and loves of Catherine of Russia. The consequence was that another director, one Ruskin, was called in by the star, an English motion picture actor named James Mason, and with Mason's assistance edited Deval's tragic drama into a comedy, as had also been done in the case of the West play. Deval's original version, however, must have been much the funnier.

The idea that sex may be dirty when treated seriously but relatively innocent when made the subject of comedy does not theatrically always hold water. More comedy treatments of sex, the records indicate, have met with disapproval and even censorship trouble than dramatic treatments. *The Rubicon* was raided by the police; *Reigen* was forbidden a public showing; *Pleasure Man* was hauled off in patrol wagons; both *The Turtle* and *Naughty Anthony* years before got into hot water; and everyone knows what happened to the burlesque shows. *The Demi-Virgin* had the authorities on its neck; *My Girl Friday* brought a stew upon itself; *Orange Blossoms* was condemned by a jury sitting in the Court of General Sessions; *The Girl With The Whooping Cough* was threatened with jail; and various other such comedy exhibits from time to time through the years have suffered difficulties. But never once so far as I know has sex, however untrammelled, got into trouble with anyone when it has been cannily merchanted in Biblical habiliments.

Deval's play, however, any way you slice it, is still pork sausage. In its original form it had not even a remotest trace of the quality of the Bathsheba-David episode in Franz Werfel's *The Eternal Road*, which contained more drama in its brief twenty-minute span than Deval's play had in its entire two and one-half hours. In the present re-

vised comedy version there is not only no quality whatever but little humor, and that of the sort which consists in allusions to the human posterior and in such dialogue as David's question of a concubine, "Did I sleep with you?", with her reply, "No, alas!" followed by the same question to another and her reply, "Yes, hallelujah!"

The plot, which makes a ponderous attempt to explain away David's peccadillo with the wife of Uriah, becomes so tangled between the still battling tragic and comic moods that the whole gives the effect of a photograph of DeWolf Hopper pasted into the Second Book of Samuel. In the leading role, Mason, reputed to be a great favorite of the cinema bobby-soxers, provides a performance but one which unfortunately does not include acting. As Bathsheba, Pamela Kellino, his wife in private life, dutifully follows him in this regard. And the rest of the troupe offers them a consanguineous support. Stewart Chaney has supplied the occasion with a handsome setting of the palace terrace and Edith Lutyens has dressed up Mason in some equally handsome Jerusalem bathrobes. But it would require a scene showing Uriah scaling the walls of Rabah at the head of a thousand supers armed with flame throwers, Bathsheba entering a den of roaring lions, and a big chariot race to reduce the evening's snores.

## THE WHOLE WORLD OVER

MARCH 27, 1947

*A comedy by Konstantine Simonov, adapted by Thelma Schnee. Produced by Walter Fried and Paul F. Moss for beyond the season performances in the Biltmore Theatre.*

## PROGRAM

FEODOR VORONTSOV		DMITRI SAVELEV	Stephen Bekassy
	Joseph Buloff	NICOLAI NEKIN	Michael Strong
NADYA	Beatrice de Neergaard	VANYA SHPOLYANSKI	
OLYA VORONTSOV	Uta Hagen		George Bartenieff
SERGEI SINITSIN	Sanford Meisner	COLONEL IVANOV	Lou Polan
SASHA	Elizabeth Neumann	MAJOR ANNA ORLOV	Jo Van Fleet
STEPAN CHEEZOV	Fred Stewart		

**SYNOPSIS:** *The entire action takes place in the apartment of Professor Feodor Vorontsov in Moscow shortly after the end of the war.*  
 Act I. Scene 1. *An early afternoon in autumn.* Scene 2. *That evening.*  
 Scene 3. *Late afternoon of the next day.* Act II. Scene 1. *Evening, two days later.* Scene 2. *Very late that night.*

Director: Harold Churman.

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**F**OR MANY YEARS, one of the choice pursuits of the drama has been the devising of ways and means to bring together in the same room with some degree of plausibility characters who in the ordinary course of events would not possibly be there. Thus, if it has not been a fugitive from the police, it has been a carriage or automobile that has broken down in the middle of the night; if not a violent storm, a quarantine; if not a burglar, ever personable, a young woman the victim of amnesia; or if not a slightly older one fleeing for one reason or another, usually connubial, to the nearest refuge, a Russian head-waiter who escaped from the Revolution and is really a Grand Duke incognito. In the later years, it has been the housing shortage. Only a few weeks before we had it in *It Takes Two* and now we had it again not only in this *The Whole World Over* but also in *Tenting Tonight* (q.v.).

Simonov's play, adapted by Miss Schnee, while it has its several amiable points is at bottom little more than the old-time girl-meets-boy comedy scarcely brought up to date through allusions to the last war and the difficulty of finding living quarters. Even in the drama of his own land, Simonov was anticipated by fifteen or more years in the latter direction by his fellow Russian, Valentine Katayev, who wrote the comedy, *Squaring The Circle*, which was shown here in 1935. This later version of the housing problem lacks the humor of Katayev's treatment and follows a much more conventional pattern. Some of the character drawing is not too bad, but the evening in the aggregate is simply more old-wine, non-alcoholic, in the old bottle.

The three characters mainly involved in the plot automatically give away the whole story:

*Item.* The young officer who has lost his family in the war and who, being given to an expressionless, laconic, and approximately moron manner, is *ipso facto* a romantic fellow.

*Item.* The young daughter of the professor who has lost her fiancé in the war, who is presently engaged to a young man who talks a lot, and who is hence drawn to the romantic vacuum.

*Item.* The elderly professor, her father, who sees the love light in the others' eyes before they see it themselves and who goes about bringing the twain together.

Additional characters are the customary Russian female major with a realistic view of sex; the bluff, hearty returned soldier agog at seeing his wife and children again after five years at the front; the comedy housekeeper who has her first taste of champagne and wonders what she has previously been doing with her life; the young boy corporal who worships his superior officer; the open-mouthed comedy janitor; etc.

Joseph Buloff, as the old professor, gives another of his familiar, excessive acting exhibitions which include everything from jovially rubbing imaginary patches of eczema on various parts of his anatomy to taking exits after



the fashion of a sneak quarterback play and from opening wide his coat and ventilating his suspenders to waving his hands as if conducting an invisible and refractory symphony orchestra. Stephen Bekassy plays the romantic colonel as well as the script and director allow; Uta Hagen the feminine love interest ditto; and Sanford Meisner the jilted suitor ditto. The best in the bit parts is Lou Polan, who as a gusty officer enjoys what the medically inclined critics of another day were wont to describe as a contagious personality.

Harold Clurman has directed the actors as if the play were a basketball game. Ralph Alswang's setting of the Russian apartment, while probably accurate, looks like the junk-shop which we customarily get in such cases. Is there never, one speculates, a Russian room without more pictures on the wall than the plaster can seemingly hold, without enough ornaments scattered about to furnish an old Amelia Bingham repertory, and without one of those large amber lamps?

## THE GREAT CAMPAIGN. MARCH 30, 1947

*A fantasy by Arnold Sundgaard, with incidental music by Alex North. Produced by the Experimental Theatre, Inc., under the supervision of T. Edward Hambleton for 5 performances in the Princess Theatre.*

### PROGRAM

EMILY TRELLIS	Kay Loring	BARBER	Glen Tetley
SAM TRELLIS	Millard Mitchell	HENRY	Alan Manson
JEFF TRELLIS	Thomas Coley	JOHN	William Roerick
TRIVETT	John Eaton	WALLIE P. HALE	Robert P. Lieb
JANE	Clara Cordery	SIDNEY GAT	Erik Rhodes
PAULA	Ruth Rowen	ROSCOE DRAY	Robert Alvin
WILDERNESS	Philip Robinson	HAMP	Paul Bain
TRUMPETER	Howard Brockway	LAURA	Marsh McLeod
MR. COOK	John O'Shaughnessy	EDDIE	Gayne Sullivan
KENNETH	Ray Boyle	ANNA	Ann d'Autremont
KENNETH'S GIRL	Mary Lou Taylor	AVERY	Howard Wendell
LANETH	Frances Waller		

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Scene 1. *Minnesota*. Scene 2. *Illinois*. Scene 3. *Columbus*. Scene 4. *Zanesville*. Scene 5. *Columbus*. Scene 6. *U. S. A.* Scene 7. *Zanesville*. Act II. Scene 1. *Illinois*. Scene 2. *U. S. A.* Scene 3. *Minnesota*. Scene 4. *Columbus*. Scene 5. *Illinois*. Scene 6. *Columbus*. Scene 7. *Minnesota*.

Director: Joseph Losey.

LIKE MOST OF the season's previous dramatic experiments, this, too, indicates that, while its author's clinical laboratory contains all the essential dramaturgical instruments, he does not know how to handle them. What he has endeavored to write is a stylized fantasy about an imaginary Presidential campaign waged unsuccessfully by an honest Middle West farmer against a disingenuous and thieving machine politician, with the former's simple platform a forthright confession of inability to fathom the chaos of present day affairs and the call in the face of the general bewilderment for the people to hold fast together lest enemies of the national welfare divide and conquer.

The author's technical attempt is to project the story and theme through a series of snapshot scenes couched in a variety of terms ranging from drama to vaudeville and travesty and from satire to symbolism, here and there re-tailed through song and dance. While he now and then briefly succeeds in molding his plan into some mild semblance of shape, it for the most part gets out of control and tangles itself, like a too exploratory fly, in the gumminess of his complex blueprint. His sense of organization most often goes awry; his wholesale materials frequently crowd one another into meaninglessness; his imagination falters; and the final impression is of a three cent stamp optimistically trusted to transmit a ton of freight.

A great deal of effort has gone into the staging of the script. If it had earlier gone into an editorial criticism and reconstruction of the latter the results would have been happier all around.

## TENTING TONIGHT. APRIL 2, 1947

*A comedy by Frank Gould. Produced by Saul Fischbein for 45 performances in the Booth Theatre.*

### PROGRAM

PETER ROBERTS	<i>Richard Clark</i>	JOE WOLLINSKI	<i>Joshua Shelley</i>
EDNA ROBERTS	<i>June Dayton</i>	ELLIOT SMOLLENS	<i>Jackie Kelk</i>
LESTER PRINGLE	<i>Michael Road</i>	YOCK JANOWSKI	<i>Henry Lascoe</i>
LEONIE ROBERTS	<i>Jean Muir</i>	SHERMAN	<i>Michael Lewin</i>
PHIL ALEXANDER	<i>Dean Harens</i>	HARRY NASH	<i>Forrest Taylor, Jr.</i>
STANLEY FOWLER	<i>Ralph Brooke</i>	BILLY HEFFERNAN	<i>Edward de Velde</i>
SUE FOWLER	<i>Betty Caulfield</i>	SAMMY FOLEY	<i>James Fallon</i>
THEDA HENDERSON	<i>Ethel Remey</i>		
MARVIN HENDERSON	<i>William David</i>		

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Scene 1. *A September evening.* Scene 2. *The following afternoon.* Act II. *Three days later, evening.* Act III. *The following morning.*

*The action of the play takes place in the combination living-room study of Peter Roberts' home in a small college town.*

*Time. The present.*

*Director: Hudson Faussett.*

THE HOUSING SHORTAGE in this instance brings into a professor's quarters in a small college town an assortment of former GI's bent on education, the young wife of one of them, and, later, a group of the former servicemen's questionable friends. It also brings into them a lot of propaganda for the bad deal former servicemen are getting in one direction and another which, housing shortage or no housing shortage, might better dramatically have been left out of doors. For all its possible justice, audiences have been getting so much of it in the theatre that repetition has flattened them. Like various other plays of the sort, this one fails to win any appreciable interest because it further treads already too trodden soil, beginning with the old business of the advertisement for boarders in-

serted in the local newspaper by the otherwise well-meaning wife and ending, like the late unmourned *Parlor Story*, with the discharged professor's eventual triumphant reinstatement. It also happens to be the fifty-eighth play in the last four seasons which has included one or more GI's in its cast of characters.

The dialogue is as empty of sap as the theme and relies upon physical fluster to give it a semblance of animation. The humor embraces the usual vaudeville allusions to the rear anatomy and for full measure offers such caramels as "He's a snob, only spelled with an 'l'" and "I'm a genius but I can't think of something ingenious." It also has recourse to the episode in which a man pretends that he has malaria and agitates his person like an earthquake the while other characters, who have promoted the stratagem, frantically bundle him up in everything lying around and pour whiskey down his not unreluctant throat.

The direction transformed the stage into an epileptics' clinic. The only players who emerged from the shakes were Joshua Shelley, who has an accurate sense of broad comedy, and Jackie Kelk, whose plaintive one hundred pounds are invested with some drollery. Among the others, Dean Harens, as the juvenile love interest, purveyed so much self-conscious charm that he seemed constantly to be bestowing loving kisses upon himself; Jean Muir was badly miscast as a young flutterbrain; June Dayton, a perky little baggage, was directed into an alarming exhibition of simulated sexual sophistication; and Henry Lascoe, as a racketeer, was permitted so to yell his lines that eardrums were shattered as far away as the downstairs smoking-room, which soon contained a liberal portion of the audience.

## BAREFOOT BOY WITH CHEEK

APRIL 3, 1947

*A musical comedy with book by Max Shulman, music by Sidney Lippman, and lyrics by Sylvia Dee. Produced by George Abbott for a beyond the season run in the Martin Beck Theatre.*

## PROGRAM

SHYSTER FISCAL	Red Buttons	PROFESSOR SCHULTZ	
ROGER HAILFELLOW			Philip Coolidge
	Jack Williams	PEGGY HEPP	Shirley Van
VAN VARSITY	Ben Murphy	KERMIT McDERMOTT	
CHARLIE CONVERTIBLE			Jerry Austen
	Loren Welch	BORIS FIVEYEARPLAN	Solen Burry
FRESHMAN	Patrick Kingdon	PLAYWRIGHT	Martin Sameth
ASA HEARTHURUG	Billy Redfield	BARTENDER	James Lane
EINO FFLIIKKINNENN		MUSKIE PIKE	Tommy Farrell
	Benjamin Miller	FIRST BAND MEMBER	
NOBLESSE OBLIGE	Billie Lou Watt		Harris Gondell
CLOTHILDE PFEFFERKORN		SECOND BAND MEMBER	
	Ellen Hanley		Nathaniel Frey
YETTA SAMOVAR	Nancy Walker		

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Scene 1. *Alpha Cholera fraternity house.* Scene 2. *College corridor.* Scene 3. *Class room.* Scene 4. *Corridor.* Scene 5. *Campus Publications office.* Scene 6. *The Sty.* Scene 7. *Street.* Scene 8. *The Knoll.* Scene 9. *Street.* Scene 10. *Alpha Cholera fraternity house.* Act II. Scene 1. *Alpha Cholera fraternity house.* Scene 2. *Street.* Scene 3. *The Knoll.* Scene 4. *Polling place.* Scene 5. *Alpha Cholera fraternity house.*

Place. *The campus of the University of Minnesota.*

Director: *George Abbott.*

AT LEAST on the stage, youth, like unripe apples and unaged whiskey, in too large doses has a deleterious effect on me. It is for that reason that such a show as this, which is loaded to the brim with adolescents, does not captivate me as it possibly may others. Gazing for two and a half hours at a stage full of kids furiously merchandising a physical exuberance in the fond hope of persuading me that

my own lost youth is an unbearable tragedy is not my idea of either convincing philosophy or grand entertainment. After even twenty minutes of watching the goslings I am firmly satisfied that if by some Faustian mumbo-jumbo I should be metamorphosed again into a nineteen-year-old — and, worse still, a nineteen-year-old in a musical show — I'd take poison.

There is always another thing I am impressed with at these youthful exhibits, and that is that, while the performers are unquestionably young by the calendar, they often appear to be old before their years, like those other victims of child labor one used to observe in the South. I have, in fact, yet to see one of these song and dance shows in which more than three or four among the crowd of youngsters have seemed as young as, say, Ray Bolger or Fred Astaire, who are in their forties, or, on the girls' side, Betty Field or Margaret Sullavan, who are in their late thirties. What makes the kids seem much older than they are is the violence of their efforts to impress us that they are still kids. The very overemphasis of their youth weakens its case, as overemphasis always has a way of doing in most other directions. They give the effect not so much of being young as of determinedly trying to prove that they are not old. It gets to be tiring.

The show is another of the college species and, like most of the kind, presents undergraduate life as a cross between imbecility and St. Vitus disease. This is all right with me, since I have always contended that musical shows are best when they are senseless. But, even so, I can not help wondering why, whether in straight plays or musicals, college boys and girls with negligible exception have generally been presented as simon-pure monkeys. That a lot of them may be, I do not deny. But, now that George Ade is gone and William Bowers has evidently died in Hollywood, it might be wished that someone would come along and give us again something about a college whose campus did not seem to be populated exclusively by the descendants and cousins of Owen Davis, Rida Johnson Young and George Marion, Jr., or by the grandchildren

of the casts of *Brown Of Harvard*, *At Yale*, and *Cupid At Vassar*.

*Barefoot Boy With Cheek*, despite its italicized youth, has an amusing moment or two, but what it sorely needs is a few doddering ancients like Bobby Clark and Ethel Merman. They might out of their mature stage experience even give a little zest to such of the show's ingredients as the painful howl upon swallowing a too powerful drink and the joke about the girl who lived in a bordello for five years and learned for the first time that the inmates got paid for it.

George Abbott, who both produced and staged the ephemerology, is evidently suffering from arrested theatrical development, since such youthful collegiate affairs, long a favorite with him, have for some time now been badly dated. This belated specimen is simply another *Toplitzky Of Minnesota*. Though a novice songstress, Ellen Hanley, makes a pleasant impression, though Nancy Walker, if you can stand Nancy Walker, which is not easy, does well enough with the role of a Communist student trying to inoculate the campus with Stalinism, and though Billy Redfield manages the conventional dumb freshman role, it all seems like an undergraduate show of yesterday put on at fifty times the expense.

The tunes are cheap radio goods; the choreography by Richard Barstow has apparently been devised by a not too apt pupil of Agnes de Mille; and the settings by Jo Mielziner, along with the costumes by Alvin Colt, look like sophomore hangovers.



## ALICE IN WONDERLAND. APRIL 5, 1947

*A revival of the dramatization of Lewis Carroll's Alice and Through The Looking-Glass, by Eva Le Gallienne and Florida Friebus, with incidental music by Richard Addinsell. Produced by Rita Hassan and the American Repertory Company for beyond the season performances in, initially, the International Theatre.*

### PROGRAM

#### PART ONE

ALICE	Bambi Linn	COOK	Don Allen
WHITE RABBIT	{ William Windom (Julie Harris)	CHESHIRE CAT	Donald Keyes
MOUSE		MARCH HARE	Arthur Keegan
DODO	Henry Jones	MAD HATTER	Richard Waring
LORY	John Straub	DORMOUSE	Don Allen
EAGLET	Angus Cairns	QUEEN OF HEARTS	John Becher
CRAB	Arthur Keegan	KING OF HEARTS	Eugene Stuckmann
DUCK	Don Allen	KNAVE OF HEARTS	
CATERPILLAR	Eli Wallach		Frederic Hunter
FISH FOOTMAN	Theodore Tenley	GRYPHON	Jack Manning
FROG FOOTMAN	Ed Woodhead	MOCK TURTLE	Angus Cairns
DUCHESS	Robert Rawlings		
	Raymond Greenleaf		

#### PART TWO

RED CHESS QUEEN		WHITE CHESS QUEEN	
	Margaret Webster		Eva Le Gallienne
TRAIN GUARD	John Straub	HUMPTY DUMPTY	Henry Jones
TWEEDLEDUM	Robert Rawlings	WHITE KNIGHT	Philip Bourneuf
TWEEDLEDEE	Jack Manning		

**SYNOPSIS:** Part One. Alice at home. The looking-glass house. White Rabbit. Pool of Tears. Caucus Race. Caterpillar. Duchess. Cheshire Cat. Mad Tea Party. Queen's Croquet Ground. By the Sea. The Trial.

Part Two. Red Chess Queen. Railway Carriage. Tweedledum and Tweedledee. White Chess Queen. Wool and Water. Humpty Dumpty. White Knight. Alice Crowned. Alice with the Two Queens. The Banquet. Alice at Home Again.

Director: Eva Le Gallienne.

**H**ARANGUING a women's club in Minneapolis in the previous month, Margaret Webster, evidently still smarting under her American Repertory Company wounds, again followed the usual procedure of the self-wounded in transferring their own delinquencies to the critics. The latter, she hotly demanded, among many other things should be required before reviewing first night productions to abstain from "dining too well and unwisely" and should also "be compelled to sit through all plays from start to finish."

Though I cannot quite bring myself to understand how a good dinner properly orchestrated with a little wine seriously interferes with the operations of the critical brain, I obliged the lady's prejudice by attending the opening of the revival, in which she conspicuously figures, fortified only by a chop, a small salad, and, God forbid, a glass of ice water. Further surrendering to her injunction, I obediently sat out the presentation from beginning to end. I apparently was thus, according to her standards, the ideal critic to review it.

In my ascetic state, my findings were as follows. The play made from the two Carroll classics is still what it was when it was originally shown fifteen years ago, which is to say a potentially very enjoyable diversion for the young of the ilk. I appreciate that a persistent tradition maintains that it also exercises a great fascination for older folk but, while as one of the latter I still regard the books as warmly as anyone else, I fear that I no longer am able to revel, as I am supposed to, in any stage version, including particularly this latest. At least one of the reasons, I think, is fairly plausible.

The idea of Alice over the long years has been firmly stamped in my mind by the memorable drawings of Tenniel, and nothing can change the picture of that beautifully delicate and wondering child. When, therefore, as in this production, Alice is played not by any such fragile and dreamful little creature but by a hearty ballet dancer

with limbs approaching the contours of the jeroboam, any illusion I am called upon to sustain in me goes right out the rear exit.

Though, to repeat, the play should rightly appeal to the young and duly has in the past, one nevertheless could not help speculating whether it would still do so in these days. Times have changed and youth has changed with them, if, alack, not for the better. What the youngsters seem to want nowadays is not any such literate and charming fantasy but melodramatic comic strips like *Superman*, sensational Western and other moving pictures which jolt them out of their seats, and violent radio shows like *Buck Rogers*, *Dick Tracy*, and *Terry And The Pirates*. It was accordingly more than doubtful whether a play about a sweet little girl's innocent adventures with bunnies, Cheshire cats and mock turtles could fascinate today's young as it did yesterday's. It must surely seem tame indeed, one concluded, to ears which daily ingest, and with a wholesale relish, the gangster talk of air shows like *Jack Armstrong*, the cops and robbers stuff of programs like *Tennessee Jed*, the pistol-cracking hullabaloo of *Tom Mix*, the spy-chasing alarms of *Captain Midnight*, and the obstreperous fireworks of such serials as *Hop Harrigan*.

It is too bad, but so is carcinoma, and there is little that seemingly can be done about it.

The production, with scenery based on the Tenniel drawings by Robert Rowe Paddock, costumes by Noel Taylor, masks and marionettes by Remo Bufano, and music by Richard Addinsell, called for good words, but the performances were often inaudible and at best only fair.

In view of the earlier monetary disquisition on the American Repertory Company in connection with its production of *Yellow Jack*, it is pointful to quote this item from the *New York Times*: "Although credited as co-producer, the repertory company does not have a financial investment in the venture, but will share in the profits. Under the arrangement, Miss Hassan has supplied the funds in exchange for cast, theatre, and other items."

The share in any possible profits was but thirty percent.

## VIRGINIA REEL. APRIL 13, 1947

*A play by John D. and Harriett Weaver. Produced by the Experimental Theatre under the supervision of Leonard Field for 5 performances in the Princess Theatre.*

### PROGRAM

OLD MAN HENRY HASKINS	THE WIDOW CURTIS	<i>Reta Shaw</i>
<i>Alan MacAteer</i>	ERNIE BRUNK	<i>Robert Emhardt</i>
RUTH JOY POMFRITT	MAY BELLE HASKINS	
<i>Jimsey Somers</i>		<i>Jetti Preminger</i>
CREED HASKINS	TUCK HENRY	<i>Richard Shankland</i>
<i>Barbara Leeds</i>		<i>C. J. Parsons</i>
JOHN LARKIN	TWO MOVERS	<i>William Tregoe</i>
<i>Don MacLaughlin</i>		
HOBE KELVIN		
<i>James Daly</i>		
KEEN SOWERS		
<i>Philip Youmans Remer</i>		

**SYNOPSIS:** *The entire action takes place in the country store of Old Man Henry Haskins, in the Blue Ridge Hill Country, a few miles from Royalton, Va. Act I. A summer morning. Act II. Late afternoon, the next day. Act III. The following morning.*

Director: *Gerald Savory.*

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WITH THIS PRODUCTION the Experimental Theatre, operating, as recorded, under the auspices of a group that has blithely christened itself with the high-toned title, The American National Theatre and Academy, concluded its first season's program. The undertaking is fundamentally a worthy one, and deserves encouragement. But while its plan is meritorious, the execution of it thus far has proved to be lame and, unless steps are taken to correct matters, collapse seems bound to overtake the project.

The enterprise itself, however, appears to recognize the fact, though a little tardily. It has voted to continue but next season to exercise a greater discrimination in the selection and editing of scripts. Had it been properly governed and managed, it would have known the necessity for such action at the start. But like various other similarly ambitious undertakings, it went off half-cocked and ex-

ploded what in the main was a series of dramatic blank cartridges. Of the five plays it produced, only one, Brei-seth's *As We Forgive Our Debtors*, had any measure of value, and that one was not, as has before been noted, a newly written script but was all of twenty years old.

The first thing that the Experimental Theatre should do is to call itself into meeting and make up its combined mind just what the term experimental is supposed to stand for. It presently seems to imagine that a notable experimental refreshment is any play, however immature, which includes in its dramaturgical pattern some choreography and song, to say nothing of enough changes of scenes to keep the stagehands' union in *foie gras* for the rest of its life. If, furthermore, the mixture deals with politics and the post-war chaos, involving the danger of a fascist form of government, it appears to be irresistible. The result of these convictions has been for the greater share a display of conventionally bad plays made worse by an injection of theoretical unconventionality. Nor have the plays, in any sense other than that the legitimate theatre would intelligently reject them, been even faintly the experimental adventurings that the project has evidently believed them to be.

The combination of dance, song and drama, as everyone else knows, is as old as, if not older than, *The Frogs* of Aristophanes, which was produced more than four hundred years before the birth of Christ. The play of innumerable short scenes is as old as the ancient classic drama of China. The allegory and parable, over which the Experimental Theatre people seem to have been so excited, go back to the Mystery and Morality plays of the dark ages. And the proclamations against dictatorship and the like have already been done to death by the Broadway commercial theatre. The experimental plays which the Experimental Theatre has so far put on, in short, have been mostly poor imitations of much older plays, both experimental and otherwise, and factually not nearly so experimental, in any true critical meaning, as some such Broadway offering as *Finian's Rainbow*.

This final play of the project's season was, however, so wholly free from the dramaturgical haberdashery previously close to the Experimental Theatre's fancy and so wholly conventional in form that it seemed like an apology for the project's earlier sins. Nevertheless and unfortunately it had little else to recommend it, since it was mainly an orthodox, badly fumbling and static character study of Virginia Blue Ridge hill folk, with, of course, the duly anticipated animadversions on the present state of society.

One of the prime requisites of any play sponsored by almost any so-called experimental group appears to be a Protest of one sort or another. Or, if not a Protest, a Warning. The idea of a play that does not contain either a Protest or a Warning, or both, seems to be unthinkable. A Protest or a Warning, in the minds of such a group, gives body to any play otherwise not worth its weight in tissue paper. It is thus that the experimental drama as we most often get it locally is little more than an obvious editorial bordered on all sides by advertisements of its author's dramaturgical incompetence.

The funnels of the Weavers' theme were as stereotyped as their mouthings and embraced; among others, the virtuous working girl who speculates on the more prosperous lot of her less anatomically immaculate sisters, the prodigal daughter who returns to her old home with grievous tales of the cruel, outside world, the old father who takes to drink to forget the bitterness of life, the sententious politician, etc. And the plot machinery involving a foundered real estate boom was merely another variant of the old nullified winning race-track ticket that figured in the plays of Booth Tarkington and others more than thirty-five years ago.

Much better than any of the Experimental Theatre's plays was Theodore Ward's *Our Lan'*, produced in the Henry Street Playhouse as one of the exhibits of the group of apprentices who call themselves the Associated Playwrights. Treating of the Negroes who were given land in Georgia by General Sherman after his Civil War opera-

tions in that territory, of the subsequent decision of the Administration to take it from them, of the struggle of the Negroes to hold it and of their final forced relinquishment of it, together with their hopeful but defeated efforts to till it to their economic independence, the play frequently manages to project, and in simple, unstrained dramatic terms, a considerable emotional force. The author's use of song, furthermore, is natural to his pattern. There are some gaps in his dramaturgical scheme, and now and then the play, which misses a desired cohesion, falters. But over-all it indicates a dawning and watchable talent.

## MESSAGE FOR MARGARET. APRIL 16, 1947

*A play by James Parish. Produced by Stanley Gilkey and Barbara Payne in association with Henry Sherek, Ltd., for 5 performances in the Plymouth Theatre.*

## PROGRAM

MARGARET HAYDEN		ADELINE CHALCOT	
	<i>Mady Christians</i>		<i>Miriam Hopkins</i>
STEPHEN AUSTIN	<i>Roger Pryor</i>	ROBERT CHALCOT	<i>Peter Cookson</i>
MAID	<i>Janice Mars</i>		

SYNOPSIS: *Margaret Hayden's apartment in Gramercy Park, New York City. Act I. Scene 1. An evening in February. Scene 2. Late afternoon; a week later. Act II. Scene 1. Wednesday evening, three weeks later. Scene 2. Saturday night. Act III. Scene 1. Sunday morning. Scene 2. Evening of the same day.*

Director: *Elliott Nugent.*

MY FATHER, a son of la belle France, was nevertheless fond of remarking that you could always be sure of seeing two things in Paris: men's trousers four inches too short for them and plays about a wife and a mistress. It is now long years since he was laid to eternal rest, but what he observed is as true today as it was then. The wife versus mistress play, whose number has run into staggering figures, has been not only one of the principal French industries for five score years but one of that nation's most voluminous exports. Whether in the form of drama or comedy it has occupied Gallic playwrights even more enthusiastically than illegitimacy and, when the latter topic has proved resistless, they have raptly combined the two. I have spent many years in France and I have yet once to be in its theatrical capital, either in my father's time or in subsequent days, when one or more of its stages were not inhabited either by a wife who puts her mate's inamorata to embarrassed rout with her overwhelming charm and



wit or by one whom the mistress brings to a disconsolate end.

There was similarly a period in the New York theatre when these goods were imported in quantities that appeared almost to equal the incoming shiploads of French and German farces and when adaptations, paraphrases or outright plagiarisms were to be encountered, it seemed, in every other Broadway block. Even in my relatively later time I can well recall the Potter to Fitch to Ditrichstein to Hopwood to Buchanan exhibits which no season was without, and in which, when it was not Grace George, it was one or another Frohman actress who confronted her husband's *belle amie* and not only triumphed over her with a superior womanly wisdom and savoir-faire but made her spouse realize that he had been a gooscap and that she was the desirable one after all.

Some of these plays were bright and entertaining, but more were fabrications palpably designed to show off some popular actress in pretty dresses. And even most of the better comedies and most of the better serious plays were little more than artfully maneuvered superficial treatments of their subject matter.

The American theatre, even as the French and English, had, however, no use for anything different, and it was thus that a dramatist like Strindberg, who as early as 1890 in *The Stronger* approached the subject with some insight and profundity, was *persona non grata* and that his plays were left either undone or, years later, relegated to single matinée or scant evening performances in the sidestreets.

In the brief *The Stronger*, the wife versus mistress theme, as in this British James Parish's "Message For Margaret," the latest reboiling of the old bones, is a consideration of the relative strength of two women in the affections of a man. The similarity otherwise, however, is that of Swedish punch and ginger beer. Strindberg worked into the theme with the tools of polished psychological understanding; Parish works into it with rusty showshop tools inherited from Henry Arthur Jones and even, like some

of the dated French, complicates it once again with the illegal baby.

Though Strindberg's wife, like Parish's, believes that she is the stronger, she appreciates the devastation of the compromise which her husband's former mistress has wrought in her. "I have had to embroider tulips, which I hate, on his slippers, because you liked them; that is why, too, we go to the mountains in the summer, because you didn't like the sea air; that is why my son is named Eskil, because it is your father's name — good God, it's agonizing when I think about it! Everything came from you to me, even your passion. Your spirit crept into mine like a worm into an apple, and ate and ate, until nothing was left but the rind."

In Parish, in place of such undaunted surgery, there is merely that kind of *matinée* psychology which, while giving a show of honesty, cautiously avoids any penetration of character which might resolve the theme in a morally displeasing manner. Which of the two women really controlled the husband's love is thus left trickily in the air, much after the dramaturgical fashion of the ambiguous ending of the before-mentioned Jones in *The Case Of Rebellious Susan*. Parish, furthermore, unable to negotiate the simplicity of straight-line psychological drama and with an avaricious box-office eye, has hopped up his theme with such narcotics as the wife's attempted murder of the mistress and the death by accident of the mistress' estranged husband, to say nothing of such dreadful hokum — paraphrased from *The Old Maid* of equally dreadful memory — as the mistress' giving over of the love-child into the keeping of the other woman.

As if stuff like that were not already sufficiently moribund, Parish makes doubly certain by talking it to death. There is, indeed, such a surplus of gabble on the part of both the wife and the mistress that, whatever the author may imagine to the contrary, it is the much more likely analysis that the husband was sick of both of them and was only too glad to die and rid himself of them. I may

not be an authority on love but, unless studious research has betrayed me, the only man on earth otherwise not a half-wit who ever bore a passionate affection for a garrulous woman passed from the scene with the death of Franz Liszt.

Brilliant acting performances' might conceivably lacquer, at least in some measure, a slop like this *Message For Margaret*, but those provided were scarcely of the roses-across-the-footlights kind. They were, in fact, little better than machine grist and quite missing in that audience seduction which follows a wily suggestion of spontaneity. Nor was the stage direction successful in concealing the stiffness of script and players in a deceptive fluidity.

## MIRACLE IN THE MOUNTAINS

APRIL 25, 1947

*A legend by Ferenc Molnár. Produced by Archer King and Harrison Woodhull for 3 performances in the Playhouse.*

## PROGRAM

CLEMENT	Kermit Kegley	BUTLER	Carl Wallace
DOMINIC	Norman Wallace	YOUNG WOMAN	Vivi Janiss
AMBROSE	Salem Ludwig	COURT ATTENDANT	Louis Cruger
THE PRIOR	John McKee	GIRL	Vivian King
THE ATTORNEY	Victor Kilian	OLD WOMAN	Marjorie Dalton
CICELY	Julie Haydon	THE PROSECUTOR	Dayton Lummis
SIMON	E. A. Krumschmidt	THE SCHOOLMASTER	Pitt Herbert
SERGEANT	John Frederick		Jack Hallen
GENDARME	Mace Gwyer		Harry Miller
VERONICA	Consuelo O'Connor	MEMBERS OF	Jack O'Brien
CORNELIA	Gloria O'Connor	THE ELDER'S	Charles Russel
THE SQUIRE	Laurence Tibbett, Jr.	COUNCIL	C. E. Smith
THE JUDGE	Manart Kippen		Augustus Vaccaro
THE MAYOR'S WIFE	Katherine Anderson	LITTLE BOY	Maurice Cavell
THE DOCTOR	Bernard Randall		Elain Flippen
THE MAYOR	Frederic Tozere	TOWNSWOMEN	Banice Winters
THE BARON	Len Patrick		Jane Du Frayne

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Scene 1. A monastery. Scene 2. The Mayor's house. Act II. Scene 1. Judgment hall. Scene 2. At the foot of Lime-tree Hill.

Scene. In a small mining town, somewhere in the dark Carpathian Mountains. About a hundred years ago.

Director: Ferenc Molnár.

EVER SINCE first I came across it in original manuscript some dozen European years ago, I have had a kind of fondness for this gentle legend. If an inquisitorial critic, arching a fierce eyebrow, were to demand why, I should surely be a bit uneasy, since my affection for it scarcely blinds me to its frailties. But there are holes in the armor of all of us and the little play happens to be one in mine. I well ap-

preciate that its theme of a divine messenger in the guise of a homely mortal who reconciles the problems of those he encounters on earth is hardly a novel one and has, in fact, been the core of various earlier plays, some of them pretty bad. I realize, too, that there is a sketchiness to the play that gives it at times the appearance of a rough first draft; that, at least up to its final act, there is a certain conventionality in the approach to some of its characters; and that those characters are themselves of a not unfamiliar brew. But, even so, there is about it all an essential sense of dramatic valentine, a feel of delicate story told by candlelight, and in the end an emotional infection that win me to it and bid the critical acids in me for the moment go hang.

There are other minor plays and stories and pieces of music and painting which, while possibly wide open to critical barbs, have similarly edged themselves into my naïve fancy. Hauptmann's *And Pippa Dances*, Saroyan's *The Beautiful People*, Beerbohm's *The Happy Hypocrite*, some of the songs in Flotow's *Martha*, Marie Laurencin's pastels are just a few examples. (I also have a peculiar liking for old-fashioned horseradish sauce on everything but maybe pie *à la mode*.) That most such specimens of my quaint regard seem to tend toward the sentimental will, of course, duly and witheringly be pointed out by the he-realists, with pictures of their children in their wallets, who loudly boast of the hair on their hearts. So be it, O.K., and gesundheit. But sentiment in drama or in any other art or phase of life is properly to be sniffed at only when it gets out of hand and becomes mush, and the sentiment in Molnár's little fantasy, like in the other directions I have mentioned, is in large part far from being that, as anyone who has had pleasure from the charming Hungarian's writings perhaps need not be told. It is, rather, sentiment which is the philosophical end-product of a man, deeply experienced of life, who has distilled it from that kind of liberal cynicism which occasionally and not without wisdom doubts itself.

The story is as simple as a child's wonder. In a poor,

small mining town in the Carpathian country of a hundred years ago there appears an alien figure of a man come to set to rights the fate of a little servant girl who has been accused of the murder of her illegitimate son. Aware that the powerful mayor of the community, the boy's father, is the guilty one, the newcomer seeks to extract a confession of the crime from him, but to no result. The law is about to proceed against the slavey when the stranger prevails upon the judge of the court to accompany him to a nearby hillside where, he allows, the decision may be resolved. There in the deepening twilight, from the grave which the mayor has dug, the alien figure lifts the child again alive and, hand in hand and as the bells of the little church atop the mountain ring out to the swelling organ and chorus of angels, leads him slowly up the high, winding trail.

The underlying theme is equally artless. "Now that I'm taking leave of you," the alien one has previously remarked to the doubter, "I implore you, don't love your brains so much. And don't set such a great store on life. Since the beginning of time, life has always cheated those who built upon it, and mocked those who put their trust in it. . . . Don't always look for explanations of everything, because all your explanations are bad. The only good explanation is the one which the worshippers of reason disdainfully dismiss from their minds. . . ."

That such a play would appeal to the kind of people who have made howling box-office successes of those dealing with fashionable adultery, kept women, and dirty politics was, of course, out of the question, and it died an immediate death. But there should be a place for it, if properly done, in the satisfaction of that lesser number to whom the theatre is not necessarily always an emotional honky-tonk.

It was lamentable that the author's direction failed entirely to capture what should be the softly tinted mood of the play and that his unacquaintance with the modern stage led him disastrously into the rococo design of the bygone Central European. Robert Davison's settings were

in themselves pictorial, though too absurdly overdone, heavy and literal for fantasy. It would have been a much more imaginative scheme to employ the thematic mountain set as a background throughout and insert, screen-wise, the monastery, mayor's house, and judgment hall. It would also have served the vital quick shifting of scenes, which was much too slow. The acting company, sorely befuddled by the direction, was most independently acceptable in the instances of the Messrs. Kilian, Tozere and Krumschmidt and Miss Haydon, but at least eight of the other roles would have profited from a drastic recasting. Molnár's further refusal to permit a smoother translation of the Hungarian script did not help matters.

A tender play was thus ruined by its own author, ably assisted in the botching by his two novice producers.

## A YOUNG MAN'S FANCY. APRIL 29, 1947

*A comedy by Harry Thurschwell and Alfred Golden. Produced by Henry Adrian for beyond the season performances in the Plymouth Theatre.*

### PROGRAM

SYLVIA WILSON	Margaret Langley	GIRL CAMPER	
HAROLD GREENLEY	Bill Talman		Colette MacMahon
DR. SPEE	Hugh Reilly	DICKIE CRANDELL	Ronnie Jacoby
DOROTHY BENNETT		OLIVER CRANDELL	
	Joan Lawrence		Raymond Bramley
DUVIE	Richard Leone	MRS. MARY CRANDELL	Lee Carney
GRILLY	Donald Hastings	FAITH	Joan Shepard
JOKEY STEPHEN	Roy Sterling	MISS WEATHERHEAD	
BUDDY	Bart Roe		Myrtle Ferguson
HELEN GREENLEY		CAMP TRILBY BOY	Mickey Carroll
	Lenore Lonergan		

SYNOPSIS: *The action takes place in a boys' bunkhouse at Camp Freedom, in Connecticut. Act I. Scene 1. A summer afternoon. Scene 2. Later that evening. Act II. Scene 1. Afternoon. A week later. Scene 2. Evening. A week later. Act III. Scene 1. The following morning. Scene 2. Later that morning.*

Director: Robert E. Perry.

THE TIN-HORN COMEDY sounded taps for the dramatic season, also for the Messrs. Thurschwell and Golden. Laid in a summer camp, it vended again the theme of the disliked uppish youth who eventually works himself into the good, nay adulatory, graces of his fellows. (The last previous revamping was John Boruff's *Bright Boy*.) The present transcribers overlaid the ancestral plot with a wealth of juvenile monkeyshines that would have embarrassed even the memorable Peck, Jr., but neglected the little matter of making them amusing. Everyone concerned in the enterprise subscribed renewedly to the prevailing theatrical idea that youth and chorea complicated by Abbott's disease are identical, with the result that the play, for all its physical boiling, seemed to be marking time against the arrival of a Broadway orchestra and dance director.





## *Especially Interesting Performances*

HENRY IV, PART I

*Ralph Richardson*

HENRY IV, PART II

*Ralph Richardson*

*Joyce Redman*

ANNIE GET YOUR  
GUN

*Ethel Merman*

*Ray Middleton*

OEDIPUS

*Laurence Olivier*

THE CRITIC

*George Relph*

*Miles Malleon*

*Laurence Olivier*

GYPSY LADY

*Helena Bliss*

THE BEES AND THE  
FLOWERS

*Sibyl Stocking*

HEAR THAT  
TRUMPET

*Bobby Sherwood*

*Ray Mayer*

THE ICEMAN  
COMETH

*Dudley Digges*

*Nicholas Joy*

*Tom Pedi*

*Paul Crabtree*

LADY WINDERMERE'S  
FAN

*Penelope Ward*

LOCO

*Jean Parker*

*Morgan Wallace*

MADE IN HEAVEN!

*Lawrence Fletcher*

HAPPY BIRTHDAY

*Helen Hayes*

*Enid Markey*

JOAN OF LORRAINE

*Ingrid Bergman*

*Sam Wanamaker*

*Romney Brent*

THE FATAL

WEAKNESS

*Ina Claire*

*Jennifer Howard*

*John Larson*

ANOTHER PART OF  
THE FOREST

*Percy Waram*

*Margaret Phillips*

STREET SCENE

*Anne Jeffreys*

FINIAN'S RAINBOW

*Albert Sharpe*

SWEETHEARTS

*Bobby Clark*

ALL MY SONS

*Ed Begley*

IT TAKES TWO

*Temple Texas*

JOHN LOVES MARY

*Loring Smith*

KING LEAR

*Donald Wolfitt*

VOLPONE

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BEING EARNEST*John Gielgud**Margaret Rutherford**Pamela Brown*

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## A NOTE ON THE TYPE USED IN THIS BOOK

*The text of this book has been set on the Linotype in a type-face called "Baskerville." The face is a facsimile reproduction of types cast from molds made for John Baskerville (1706-1775) from his designs. The punches for the revived Linotype Baskerville were cut under the supervision of the English printer George W. Jones.*

*John Baskerville's original face was one of the forerunners of the type-style known as "modern face" to printers: a "modern" of the period A.D. 1800.*

*The typographic scheme and the binding design are by W. A. Dwiggins. The book was composed, printed, and bound by The Plimpton Press, Norwood, Massachusetts.*









